Every single day, every single time somebody is pushing your code to production and you're releasing a feature or an enhancement,

you are making the product better or you're making the product worse, but the products never remain same.

And so with every release that your competitor is making and every release that you're making,

you're either making chess points, moves against them, positive points or you're going negative.

And I think like that framework, it actually drives an insane amount of clarity in terms of what you're doing

and what the impact is going to be.

Welcome to Lenny's podcast, where I interview world-class product leaders and growth experts to learn from their hard-won experiences,

building and growing today's most successful products.

Today, my guest is Varun Parmer.

Varun is Chief Product Officer at Miro, and prior to Miro, he was Senior Vice President and Chief Product Officer at Box.

As I share with Varun at the start of our chat, I've always been really curious about the product culture at Miro,

partly because everyone I've ever met for Miro has been super interesting and super smart,

and partly because they've been able to grow as a business and a product in an incredibly competitive market.

In our conversation, we get really deep into the product values and principles at Miro,

their product development process, how Varun approaches competitive threats,

how a bimonthly company-wide product demo ritual led to saving months of engineering work on a feature,

plus insights into how Miro got started, how they grow today,

and what their product team has learned about working with a large sales org.

Varun is amazing, I learned a lot, and I hope you find it as interesting as I did.

With that, I bring you Varun Parmer after a short word from our sponsors.

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I have a quick request.

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That's usebraintrust.com slash Lenny, for when you need talent yesterday.

Varun, welcome to the podcast.

Thank you, Lenny. So excited to be here. Thanks for having me.

I'm really excited to have you here.

I've been looking forward to having a chance to dig into Miro's product culture and the way Miro works for a while.

We've actually had a few guests ex-Miro Niers. Is that what you call yourselves?

Yes, Miro Niers.

Okay, Miro Niers. So we had Elena Verna on the podcast, who's amazing, and Barbara, who I think worked in marketing.

And everyone I've always met from Miro has been just really smart and really interesting.

And it just feels like you guys have a really interesting product culture that I haven't felt like has been shared a lot.

And so I have a bunch of stuff I want to dig into there.

And one question out of the bat.

You guys have a really interesting history and specifically the way your company's structured,

which is that you're co-located in Amsterdam and San Francisco.

So first of all, is that correct?

The company is a global company, so we've got 12 different hubs.

So we have multiple offices in U.S., four different offices, and then multiple hubs in Europe as well and presence in Asia back as well.

So I think by now we have a global footprint, yeah.

Got it. So a question I wanted to ask off the bat is just how has that cross-cultural approach to product teams impacted the way that you guys built product and the way the company operates?

The one thing that's really interesting, Lenny, around the way Miro is set up is that our product organization is actually based in Europe and our go-to-market organization is worldwide.

And so our product management team, our designers, our engineers are located across three different hubs in Europe.

And what that sort of leads to is a couple of practices that we have as part of our culture.

So the first one is practicing empathy to gain insights.

And it's not just practicing empathy in terms of customers and figuring out what customer pain points and problems we can solve.

But given our distributed nature in terms of having a global footprint and a lot of our go-to-market teams, folks in sales and marketing and customer success are in different continents or geographies, we have to make sure that we actually practice that internally.

So when we are interacting with folks, let's say in San Francisco and those folks are out there meeting some of our large customers and stuff,

how do we in the product organization understand their perspective and bring that perspective into how we design, prioritize and build products?

So I think that's one thing that's unique.

I would say the other thing that's less to do with the location, but I think is sort of the core cultural value or philosophy

that Andre, who's the founder and CEO has instilled in all of us, is practicing sort of teamwork.

How do we actually come together as a team and bring down sort of the silos that might exist across functions?

And I'll talk a little bit around how we are structured in the product organization so that it's a cross-functional perspective.

We bring to everything that we're doing because we believe the best work happens when we bring different diverse perspectives to the problem and then co-create the outcome that the customer is looking for.

I want to pull in these threads actually real quick.

So you talked about this value of empathy and the importance of having empathy across because you guys are located in different locations and in different cultures and also this idea of teamwork.

What's something that you've done that helps you do that?

Either build empathy and maintain empathy across teams or make sure that people work in teams and not like, hey, there's this other team over there doing something else.

One of the most powerful sort of things that I've seen work is the questions that you ask.

The questions that you ask when you're going through a product review or you're trying to sit down and talk to someone and trying to understand why did they prioritize something over the other.

And was it something that was done through interactions they've had with folks internally or externally?

So I think it's a question, the set of questions to ask in terms of like, how did they get to where they are today?

And was it informed by understanding of the insights that collectively the organization has?

Was it informed by their understanding of where the market is involving, where the competition is going?

Was it informed through the series of insights they have either through inbound feedback that's coming through our different channels where customers are giving feedback or some outbound interactions that they've had?

So I think sort of just like trying to double click and getting to the details in terms of what insight led them to recommend certain things or make a left turn or a right turn is where I think is the most powerful way to make sure that those things are informed through practicing empathy internally and externally.

Got it. So there's this kind of cultural value of just assuming good intention and asking questions to understand where someone came from.

I don't know if you'll have something off the top of your head, but is there a story or an example of that comes to mind where that was done well or not done well? I don't know, in something you recently were building?

Maybe there are certain things like, for example, anytime we're trying to build a new experience, like one of the approach we want to take is like very quickly validate that our original hypothesis, you know, is that sound or not?

And we are big fans of the design sprint framework. You know, so what Jake Knapp has done, I think is really amazing in a short five day window. You can get a small set of people to, you know, quickly mock up a concept, you know, converted into some sort of a prototype and go out there and get some sort of a validation.

So oftentimes when we're working on some of these new things, we have our product teams that are focused on zero to one initiatives, run this five day initiative.

And at the end of it, we say, you know, oh, this is great. Like, you know, who did you sort of get insight from? So there's a capability that we recently released. It's called Miro TalkTrack, which essentially allows you to asynchronously do a, you know, do asynchronous collaboration by recording audio video on top of a Miro board.

And we had sort of two fundamental choices we could make. One, we could go down the path of what everyone's doing where you could do like a screen recording and then, you know, spit out a series of videos like pixels being captured.

Or what we did was we actually went down a different path and the path that we went down was we basically synchronized the movement of a board. So let's say, you know, Lenny's presenting a board, you know, some template he's created in terms of best practices for PMs.

But he wants to have, you know, some sort of a talk track on top of it and audio video feed. And what we're doing is we're actually capturing the movement of the board that Lenny's going through, along with the video talk track that's on top.

And the reason why we did that was because we had an insight that came through some of our

interviews, what our users want to do is they want to use Miro for collaboration.

While communication is an important aspect of how teams come together, where we believe our sweet spot is that we want people to use Miro for collaboration.

And by making sure that they could actually use a video recording and while the video recording is playing, they could add in a sticky note, they could add in a comment, they could actually, you know, give a reaction.

And we were able to develop this insight by practicing empathy as part of the design sprint framework when we went and started to show our original concept and the world and built on top of that.

That is a really cool story. And that came out of this sprint framework, these five days sprint approach.

That's right.

That is cool. I got to have that guy on this podcast, Jake Knapp, you said, right?

Yes, yes, yes. I can text him right now and I can make the introduction.

Let's call him right into this podcast live. Tell us how the sprint process works.

That is awesome. This connects a little bit to another question I wanted to ask around the top is, you guys are in a really competitive space and it feels like Miro was very early in online collaborative whiteboarding space.

And then I think during COVID it just became a huge, you know, the remote work exploding like, holy shit, everyone needs this immediately.

And over the years, many companies have come into the space that you are all in.

And it feels like Miro continues to do extremely well.

Like I remember when Figma launched Fig Jam, there was a lot of just like Miro's dead and Figma's getting into the space.

They're juggernaut game over.

Clearly that's not been the case.

And it just feels like, I don't know what it is internally that you all do that continues to allow you to compete and continue to innovate in the space.

And I'm curious, just like, is there something to how Miro approaches competition and also just, I don't know, the way they approach these sorts of challenges that is unique or interesting that you can share?

But if you look at the mission for Miro, you know, we empower teams to create the next big thing.

And our focus is to enable, you know, teams that are, you know, innovating and generally innovation happens at the intersection of a bunch of, you know, cross-functional folks coming together.

Like we discussed folks in product management or design or engineering or analytics or product marketing or research.

And what we find Lenny is that, you know, there are a lot of tools out there, and those tools are generally sort of focused on a particular persona.

And, you know, maybe they're trying to solve the needs of a designer and a designer has a workflow that they're trying to do and they're using a specific tool.

And they sit at the adjacency of extending that core use case.

The fundamental value that Miro provides is that we enable teams.

And I think like what's unique about our product and we can talk about the capabilities and roadmaps and use cases that we are investing in and we already have as part of the product is that we take a team-centric lens.

So we're not saying, hey, we're building a tool that just works for designers or hey, we're building a tool that just works for engineers because we fundamentally believe that innovation happens when cross-functional teams come together.

And when you look at the problem through that lens, you realize that you have to actually architect your solution.

You have to think about the use cases and you have to go and prioritize certain experiences that are different and our customers see value in that, right?

And I think like that's probably one sort of big macro aspect of how we think about sort of our capabilities and products and why our customers think of us differently.

So that's one point.

I think the second thing is Miro is actually used obviously by teams that are creating these innovative products and we actually have broad applicability across industries and verticals.

So while some tools might be hyper-focused on sort of digital experiences and Miro has a great set of offerings there in terms of core capabilities, what we find is that Miro is used equally by companies in manufacturing, by companies in healthcare,

by companies in architecture and engineering and construction functions, by companies that are in aerospace, governmental agencies and medical agencies and so on and so forth.

So I think the platform is actually much more agnostic in terms of its capabilities and what we offer that actually makes it more accessible and appealing to organizations that want to go beyond just like digital experiences.

And then I would say finally, there are a set of capabilities that are available very, very uniquely to Miro that are valued by our users that again is a big reason people come to Miro.

So for example, if Lenny is trying to conduct a big workshop with a bunch of product folks and he wants to facilitate that workshop and wants to have certain folks focus on one part of the board and others focus on the other part,

then there are some advanced sort of capabilities that enable certain use cases like workshops or if you want to use Miro for some team rituals or from some agile practices, there are sort of core set of capabilities that you could use the product for that are missing in some of the other capabilities.

I would say a combination of all of those three things continue to sort of drive differentiation. And I would say on top of that, we are a big fan of our community and we believe that community love is what drives us.

That's the fuel that sort of keeps us going every single day.

So just to kind of summarize and I was taking notes as you're chatting just thinking about what allows you all to continue to do well in the market, considering all the competition constantly coming at you.

One is you mentioned just there's kind of like a innate multifunctional architecture, which is hard for someone to copy if they weren't built from that without the start.

So it sounds like you are focusing on a much like a wide spectrum of personas and it's not just tech employees basically. Also just there's like specific features that end up being really important that

maybe people have a hard time building and then this last piece of the community.

Awesome. Let's dig into the product team a little bit and understand how you all build product and structure product team. How many PMs are there at Miro and then just broadly how many employees just to give people a set of little bit of context.

Give or take about 1800 employees at Miro globally across all of the clubs and specifically in terms of the number of product managers we are over 450 PMs in the team.

And then how are the, how's the product team structured? Is it like outcome oriented? Is it product area oriented? Is it user persona oriented? Is it something else? How do you, how do you think about the structure of the product team?

Yeah, so I would say it's, it's, it's maybe a hybrid structure that we have, but the sort of the foundation of the, of the team setup is, is around persona. So we have what we refer to as streams, you know, some companies refer to as domains.

But essentially, it's a set of individuals that are focused on solving the problems for a key persona. So just to give you an example, we have a stream that's focused on enterprise and in enterprise, we are looking at the IT admin persona.

We're looking at the security persona or the compliance persona. So, you know, there are set of folks who are creating a roadmap and innovating in that, you know, for that audience.

There's another stream which is called platform, where we are going after the developer, you know, install base, you know, folks that want to use Miro as a platform and build apps that they can actually make available either on the marketplace for everyone to use, or they could be developers that are inside of a large organization and they're trying to integrate Miro with their specific use cases and workflows and business systems.

So that's another sort of stream that's focused on that. And there are a couple of other streams like that. And then finally, there are some, some just like horizontal sort of streams, if you will, like, you know, we have a big focus given that we are a PLG led company around growth and self self business.

We've got a stream that's actually focused on our core internal infrastructure, you know, we've got a stream that's actually focused on data science. That's doing all of the magic that we started to release in terms of Miro AI, etc, etc.

So I would say it's a combination of those. At the heart of it is we are focused on personas, and we are sort of aligning people around, you know, solving problems and creating value for that persona.

That is really interesting. One of the downsides of a persona based approach I imagine is that products just features keep getting added that solve that users pain points. What have you learned about keeping the product consistent and having kind of a holistic perspective on the experience? How do you, how do you address those challenges?

Architecturally, like sort of there are like two sort of things that we have done that allow us to not sort of pigeonhole ourselves into that specific way of working and then and I completely agree with you like, you know, like you could lead to that.

The first one is actually when we think about the product org, like we call our org, it's called AMPT, A-M-P-E-D. And this is actually going back to our earlier point, Lenny, we had around like what's unique about the product culture, what's unique about Miro and we talked about like teams coming together, you know,

removing barriers or silos cross functionally. So AMPT stands for like analytics, marketing, product, engineering and design. And everything that we do in the product org, when we say the product org, we actually don't need product managers.

We actually don't mean product managers, designers and engineers. What we mean by product org in Miro is this AMPT function. And by having this cross functional representation where product marketing team is deeply, deeply embedded inside of each of these streams.

What we do is that we have, you know, different perspectives that come in where they say, oh, wait a second, you know, did you think about the end user experience? And if you're thinking about the end user experience, you know, you have someone in the team that says, wait a second, did you actually think about the enterprise requirements or what's what's needed in the largest

corporation. So I think the unique setup of bringing these cross functional folks allows us to sort of course correct. The second thing is sort of the ways of working that we have, you know, we have these product reviews that happen.

So, you know, we generally classify anything that we're doing, you know, you know, in terms of its complexity around like, you know, you know, small, medium or, or high complexity and anything that's that's being, you know, worked on is actually being shared with the entire organization.

If it's something that's small to medium, it's actually, you know, shared with the entire, you know, product org. In fact, like if you are non product, you can actually subscribe to that Slack channel as well.

So everybody sees what the product org is working on everybody sees like what the core hypothesis is like what are what is the solution for that like what is the proposed design for it like what are how we thinking about the capabilities.

And then anything that's big actually goes through a formal process like a product review where there's a meeting and like a bunch of us are in there. And, and it's up to sort of us including the product leaders to basically make sure that we are connecting the dots in terms of having a much more holistic perspective.

And I would say lastly, you know, as Miro has sort of scale like the spectrum of companies know all the way from, you know, a team that might have two or three people and might be taking out the credit card and using Miro for their own team all the way to a large corporation that might have 50,000 80,000 employees all of them are using Miro.

You know, we've, we've, we've come to realize that at some point, like, you know, the deep enterprise requirements need to be encapsulated in a set of, you know, requirements or best practices and we need to make sure that those get democratized across all of the future teams.

When I'm thinking about building a new feature, you know, I have a checklist in front of me where I can say here are the 10 things that I need to think of that I need to incorporate early on in my thinking in the architecture in the definition of the process so that it doesn't come downstream.

I would say that's an area where we're still working on. And more recently, we put like more focus and energy and there's a product product manager who's now leading that particular charter.

I love all these details. So this amp structure, I love that. So there's analytics is a product marketing and is marketing and then product engineering design.

It's it's rare that you see marketing as a part of teams as a leadership kind of part of the leadership group. Do you have a sense of what impact adding that had on the team or where that came from,

like, or is that just historically been something
Miro has prioritized marketing and product marketing.
So this was done, you know, before I got here and I wish I could take credit for it, but I can't.
And, and I think this was, you know, the result of an observation, which is quite similar to what you're saying, which is, you know, while we might be developing a lot of the features and pms are sort of thinking bottoms up in terms of what we are building.
But we might find that what we have built might not be able to capture the imagination of what we originally thought it would. And a big part of that is how are you going to think about positioning? How are you going to think about competitive differentiation? How are you going to package it up so that, you know, the sellers that are out there are able to position it in a way that the customer, you know, in this case, the buyer might be an IT professional,
you know, might be, you know, line of business leader can basically see the full vision of where we are going. And I think by having product marketing as part of AMP, you know, we now bring that unique perspective that may be missing in certain teams.
PMs are more acting as product owners are more focused on like core sort of problem and solution, but not thinking about positioning, because that's so important, especially, you know, when you're thinking about a market that we are increasingly in that that there is there's
competition there and that's one of the first things we started off with and that's top of mind for you as well, is that everything that we're doing, you know, has to be looked through that lens.
And, and one of the core philosophies that I have Lenny is that the success of a company is a direct relation of what the competition allows you to do.
I feel like not many people sort of talk about that, but, but in many cases in my professional career, and I've been at it for, you know, close to 24 25 years is that every single instance when I looked at a company accelerated their growth, or there was a
deceleration of growth. It was a direct relation to what the competition allowed you to do. And obviously, you know, you have to do everything that you that you should be doing. But competition is that the biggest variable that that allows you to figure that out.
I want to hear more about your core product philosophies that was, but let me dig into the one you just shared. So there, what you find is that the way you grow or stop growing is often a direct result of your competition. Is there an example of that that comes to mind like I'm guessing maybe
box versus draw boxes, an experience you had there. Or if not, what was an example of that they've experienced to make it a little more concrete even.
You know, for those of us who've been in the in the collaboration space and I've been doing collaboration and productivity apps for over 20 years over two decades, you know, at some point, you know, you have companies like Microsoft that get really attracted
to a space and you can see the trajectory of a business that's growing at a certain clip. And then all of a sudden there's there's a there's a competitive product that enters that has the might of distribution and the might of pricing.
And that's just like a direct example. And I think I've seen that multiple times, first at Adobe where I was part of the document cloud business, clearly saw that, you know, at box as well.
And, and I think like you can in general, like sort of look at every single category and you can say, you know, there was a cat that there was a category leader and they were growing at a certain clip

or a certain base.

And all of a sudden they were a bunch of entrance that get in and what happens to your growth rate and it's all dependent on how strong is the competitor in terms of providing a good enough solution that's one.

And the second is how strong is the competition in terms of their distribution outreach. And then the third thing is how strong is the competition in terms of the pricing and packaging.

And really like this discussion, especially because often the advice is, don't worry about the competition, just focus on the customer, it's going to be fine, which, which you're saying is that's not right.

And I agree. What do you do with that in mind? How does that impact the way you build product or strategy? Is there some you could share that maybe tactically someone could leverage and to have their approaching their product strategy?

It depends on like who the competition is and what is their advantage here. And, you know, we talked about one specific competitor and I have a lot of respect for them.

By the way, and I learn a lot from them every single day in terms of how they make bets and how they enter markets and stuff. At some point, I'm going to write a book on them.

I feel we'll have to come back to talk about that.

That's right. Yeah. And, and I think like it's it sort of comes down to, you know, you know, how do you think about your unique place, you know, relative to, you know, all of these players and and in in in your customer

mind, are they able to clearly understand what is the unique value that you deliver relative to everything else? And part of that is is is the unique capabilities you provide part of that is how you're packaging those unique

abilities to them and making sure that they in their mind can see how you coexist in this overall sort of tech ecosystem that they might be investing in to enable their employees or, you know, to enable them to to operate.

And so I think it's it's sort of looking at that from from that lens. Yeah.

Got it. So what I'm hearing is be very clear about your differentiator and continue to invest there and then make sure your positioning is clear around why you're just identifying here's why we're different and we're not just like a better version of this thing.

Here's why we're different and making sure that's really clear.

Exactly. And I think the only the other thing I would say like there's another core philosophy I have which is products either get better over a period of time or they get worse products never remain the same.

And I think you can take that philosophy to a bunch of things in life, but I'm going to take the lens of products which is my core philosophy is like every single day, every single time somebody is pushing your code to production and you're releasing a feature or an enhancement.

You are making the product better or you're making the product worse but the products never remain same and and the lens for this Lenny is actually from a customer's perspective from the end user perspective.

And the thing is that, you know, if you are a player where there's no one else in the market, that's one thing, right? So that's great.

Like, you know, kudos to you for actually identifying a blue ocean strategy and sort of executing to that.

But most markets, most products actually have, you know, either direct or indirect competitors that are available.

So from the customer's mind, you know, you're doing something, the competitors doing something.

So in their mind, they're looking at these products and they're looking at these companies and they're saying, you know, which is better versus not.

And so with every release that your competitor is making and every release that you're making, you're either, you know, making chess points moves against them positive points or are you going negative.

And I think like that framework, if you have in mind, you know, it actually drives an insane amount of clarity in terms of, you know, what you're doing and what the impact is going to be because every single move that you're making,

the customer has that sort of in their mind, if not explicitly, implicitly that they are actually comparing these things.

And I think it brings a level of focus in terms of where you need to invest and why you need to invest and why this is going to make those decisions.

And so I think it allows at least for product leaders to make some high quality decisions around the bets that they're making and how they're going to play out in terms of like,

eventually, you know, once the dust settles, you know, and the market at large is going to say, I'm going to standardize on something.

And now I feel I need to go get it for everyone.

Or this is the tool that I want to use for this particular use case, that all of these decisions that they were making ladder up to that final sort of play that you have to do in terms of the market consolidation that eventually happens.

This is so interesting. Essentially, what you're saying is that you find that being very close to understanding the competition really well is really essential.

Versus like this kind of the other end of the spectrum almost from just like, don't worry about the competition, don't pay attention.

I like these like this point metaphor of just like, are we moving ahead or further behind?

Is there where you operationalize that to kind of track that?

And then also just like, how do you not over-obsess with, let's just catch up, get more features, that kind of thing?

Like, how do you find that balance?

I'll be honest, like, I don't think we've figured it out. We haven't cracked the nut in terms of how to operationalize this, but I know you are based more than me on some of these things.

So maybe we can work on this and come up with something.

All right, that'll be something we work on.

Any other product philosophies that you want to share? That was awesome.

This is all like sort of related to it. It's like a string of pearls.

I think like there's maybe like one more pearl we can actually thread into the needle right here.

That's true.

Which is, you know, we talked about sort of how do you ladder this up and stuff.

And then the question is, okay, how do you know, like, you know, that, you know, everything that you're doing is that in the right direction or not?

And like, you know, should you move slow and be much more mindful about the things that you're doing or should you move fast and like make certain bets and then decide certain things and stuff?

And I think like there are two sort of views that are out there, you know, my personal sort of perspective on this is that what you want to do is that you want to be the first one to hit the brick wall.

And, you know, this is particularly true when you are in a market that is competitive.

And the reason for that is that, you know, if you consider yourself as an innovation centric company and you believe that, you know, you are building experiences that fundamentally don't exist anywhere else and you're sort of paving the way for the rest of the folks

to basically get inspired with how you are building these experiences, speed is the single biggest determinant in terms of in my experience in terms of, you know, who ends up being more successful versus not.

And I think like this, I don't know, maybe this is a little bit controversial where, you know, people say like, you know, go slow to actually go fast.

And I think I have a lot of respect for that in certain areas you should do that.

But when you are trying to, you know, figure out like sort of new experiences and stuff, you know, and you don't know, you know, if it's going to resonate or not like, you know, speed is something that you should accelerate for the organization.

You know, I think like Frank Slutman, you know, talks about this, you know, a lot in his book and you know, you know, how can you accelerate and I think for me, from a product perspective, like the fundamental concept is like, can you be the first one to hit the brick wall where you have to where you have the learning faster than anyone else in the market so that you can decide, oh my God, the path that I was going was not the right path, I need to do 10 degrees, you know, best or I need to do 30 degrees east.

And I think as long as you're like one or two or three steps ahead of everyone else in terms of uncovering or, you know, discovering those insights, then I think, you know, you can continue to be ahead of the pack in terms of, you know, building your product and business.

You're talking about urgency.

I've never met a founder or product leader who doesn't want their team to move faster.

They're always encouraging their team, how do we move faster?

I'm curious if there's something you've learned tactically about helping your team move more quickly. You mentioned Frank Slutman's book Amped Up is what it's called, by the way, in case you want to check it out and he's big on just like creating a sense of urgency, constant urgency.

And we'll link to that and show notes. But yeah, what have you found helps create urgency and generally helps your teams move faster than then just like move faster everyone.

My fundamental sort of belief here then is that every product manager, I can talk to product managers because, you know, there is reason certain one someone wants to be a product manager because like it in my view, it's like one of the most thankless jobs like you get to do.

And it's like, why do you have to do this? And there's like, but like it attracts a certain personality

and that personality is driven by challenge and that personality wants to prove that they can solve this challenge and do something amazing.

So I think, fundamentally, you know, the product persona actually wants to move fast. I think the reason why in some cases, we are not able to move fast is because of roadblocks that we run into.

And those roadblocks can manifest themselves into technical challenges, they can manifest them in cells of organizational challenges, they could be priority challenges and so on and so forth.

So my fundamental sort of approach to solving that is to ensure that the product leads who are working on these capabilities can can instantly raise their hand and and call out that there are challenges that they are running into.

And then the job of the leadership team, the product management team is to essentially go and quickly resolve those issues.

And I think like if you are able to resolve those issues, then what it does is it actually starts a virtual cycle where you can actually start to see those wins.

And once you see those wins, you actually create that courage to do more things.

And maybe because you've seen how that specific roadblock was solved and you have a pattern matching that you've developed now, you can solve a lot of those things on your own.

And it's the next level of challenge that you're now going to raise your hand.

And what that does is it starts to build this organizational competency in terms of how you can figure out, you know, what to build.

And you know, we all find these people in our organizations where there's someone somehow is able to do certain things in one tenth the time that would take a normal person.

It's not that they are like 10 times faster.

It's just that in my observation that they've figured out which part of the core base they should build in versus not who should be part of their team and who could not be how they need to define that from a scope perspective.

What does success look like?

And it's the architecture of bringing all of these things together that actually brings that magic formula in terms of like, hey, we are able to deliver faster.

I really like this topic.

What I'm hearing is one of the biggest roots of slowing slowdown in a company and product development is blockers not being unblocked.

And I always feel the same thing.

Like if you like a PM's job, like number one job is to unblock their team because like their job is basically make the most out of their team that they're marshaling towards some outcome.

And the way you do that is just figure out what's slowing them down.

You talked about this like idea of a PM raises their hand to leadership.

Hey, we're blocked by this thing.

Is there like a process you've come up with there to help you do that?

It's like an example to.

I would say like we are trying to sort of systematically like ingrain this in the culture of the organization.

So we have a motto in the product org.

It's very simple.

Single sentence, deliver customer value faster with high quality.

That's it.

And everything that we do.

And when I say everything, everything like from like, you know, formants and reward system and measurements, everything is based on this one single statement.

And it has three attributes.

The first one is deliver customer value.

And we believe customer values only delivered when customers use it.

So anytime as a PM at Miro, when you ship something, we're looking at, well, what was the metric you were going to move and how much did it move?

And we have some original targets that we can go back to.

So that's the first aspect of what we're doing, deliver customer value.

The second one is move faster.

And there are certain cycle times that we are measuring across the organization.

Okay.

You know, from the time you came up with the idea to the time that you actually pitched a solution to the time you actually shipped it to the time we actually moved the metric.

It's information that has been collected and is being made available to the organization.

And you can say, Hey, if it was a small medium or large, you know, what's the average?

What's the median?

What's the variance?

And you can say, Hey, like looking at this data, what can be improved?

So that's on the faster aspect of it.

And then the last one is around high quality, which is, you know, we want to build best in class, you know, collaboration experiences.

So we are always, always getting inspired by what we find, you know, in, in applications and experiences that we see around us.

And we're saying, Hey, when it comes to, you know, designing sharing flows, you know, we believe that these are the three, you know, apps that have the best in class sharing flows.

When it comes to, you know, designing some synchronous capabilities like these are the best in class apps that we should look at.

So we are always trying to make sure that we are benchmarking ourselves against that.

And we have a design team on a regular basis, like when we ship stuff on a monthly basis, our design leadership team does a triage of everything that got shipped into like high quality or not high quality.

It's just like a binary function.

And we're doing that.

And we're saying, Hey, the reason why we believe it's not high quality is because of ABCDE.

And we're making it available to other designers so they can actually start to build sort of that telemetry in terms of like some things are more subjective.

But you can start to see some pattern matching and say, like, Hey, you know, this is what this is

what it looks like.

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Okay, so every month or so, the design team looks at everything that's shipped and puts things into a bucket.

Either this is, it's like a binary thing, high quality or not high quality.

Wow, that is so cool.

And then one, what do they do with that?

Do they send it out to the product team?

And then two, is this just like FYI?

Or is it like we need to fix all these low quality things going back?

Or is it more just like for the future, please be aware that these are not high quality?

Yeah, so it's actually both.

Generally what happens is that the design leadership team is doing this and there's one particular design leader who's the designated person to make sure that this is happening on a regular basis.

And right now the way we're using it is that we're actually using it to calibrate and align around the design leadership around what we mean by high quality.

Because it's one of those things, right?

If you've never seen colors and I ask you, Lenny, describe pink and compare that to red.

And if you haven't seen colors, how do you describe colors?

You can, but if I show you and I say, Lenny, these are three examples of what pink is and these are three examples of red is, then you're like, oh, I get pink and I get red.

So there are certain things that you just, when you write it, it's very, very hard to describe it.

But if you show specific examples, it's very clear, oh, I get it.

I get why, how pink is different than red.

But if I try to describe it, it's going to be very hard.

So we got into these endless conversations at some point about a year ago where we were saying,

we need high quality, we need high quality and people like, let's just go and define this thing.

And we had like a bunch of our leaders go and like write like, you know, documents, like really long documents in terms of like, what are the attributes and how do we define those attributes and how do we measure those attributes and how do we enable people to do that.

And it felt like it's, it's a good thing because we are trying to codify it, but it also felt like, you know, it was a very heavy way of solving that problem.

And then, you know, we just came up with this approach, which is like, what's great versus not great and just start classifying it.

And as you know, it's like modern AI systems are like classification systems.

And we just going to say it sounds like reinforcement learning approach to defining.

That's right.

That's right.

And, and I think it's worked, worked decently.

Well, I would say, like, with most things, like, you know, we need to operationalize it and we need to make sure that now we are able to do that.

We need to make sure that now we are democratizing it and everybody has access to it and so on and so forth.

But I think it's, it's, it's been, it's been a good start.

And now, you know, we are, we are sharing this more openly with the, with others in the, in the org.

When I said that, I imagine you from the outside, you have a very unique culture and approach to product.

That's a great example of that.

I've never heard of a process like this.

So what I'm hearing is essentially you're trying to build the muscle within the organization of what is quality.

It's like this continued heuristic of like, okay, I get it.

And so pms on the team start to like understand in their head what that means.

Right.

Super cool.

You also talked about the middle part of that sentence of moving faster and then you track and measure that somehow.

Can you talk more about that?

Cause that's something every product team is always trying to understand.

Like, how do we know if we're going faster for going as fast as we could?

How do you actually do that?

How do you measure these things?

The core philosophy there is like, you know, velocity is more like the game of golf where you're just playing against yourself.

Like it's not like if Lenny and Verona are out of the golf course, like it doesn't matter.

Like, you know, I'm not competing against you.

I'm just competing against myself because that's the only I'm going to just hit the ball.

So it's like, how better, how much better can we get?

So I think our core philosophy is around that.

And what we're trying to do is that, you know, on all the product teams, the feature teams that we have,

we're just collecting all the information and we're making it available to everyone so that they can actually see what the cycle times are.

And what we're interested in is from the time that you have an insight from the time you believe I can do something unique for my user, for my persona.

You know, how long does it take for you to actually deliver that value?

And, you know, we have, you know, we have a product process that we follow, which starts with the P-Strat, which is a strategy.

And then we go into P0, which is, you know, definition of the problem.

Then we go into P1, which is definition of the solution.

And then we go into P2, which is once the solution is shipped, you know, are we hitting the metrics that we originally had defined up front before we decided to work on this?

And, you know, you have all of these stage gates.

And then we basically classify everything that we're doing in small, medium, large, you know.

And you can go in and you can say, hey, I thought this was a small thing.

And, you know, a small thing is like something you can get it done in less than a month and so on and so forth.

And, you know, there are like 50 other product teams that are shipping the features and what's the average?

What's the variance, you know?

What's the median?

And, oh, wait a second.

Actually, it seems like I took way more time in the problem definition stage.

Let me actually try to go talk to this other product team that actually did it much faster.

Or, oh, you know, I actually did it really, really fast.

And the reason why I did it fast was because of this.

Let me go share this out with the broader team.

And usually, like the product ops function, we call it product excellence internally, like sort of product excellence function is recording some of these things.

I would say, you know, getting reliable data.

And then because we have some things that are going through meetings and there's something that are going through Slack, like, you know, we could, we could do better on some of those dimensions.

But all of this data is available and we, we provide it openly and folks can benchmark themselves against that.

So cool.

Okay.

Save this pstrap.

You called it document, which is kind of like an initial concept.

And then it's interesting is the P0, P1, which is often for bugs, but it's cool that you use it for defining your products.

So pstrap is just like an idea pitch.

P0 is a spec basically like a one pager for the product.

And then P1 and P2 are basically getting to like, here's the actual product we're building.

And you basically track time per step and map it to here's how large this project should be.

And over time you track per person.

It sounds like just like, are you matching the benchmarks of like how long a small project should take across each step?

Yeah.

Exactly.

Wow.

That is extremely cool.

Whatever templates you can share these things that we can include in the show notes would be awesome.

Yes.

Because people are always looking for just like, I want to do some of this stuff.

And they just plug and play the more the merrier.

Yes.

Shifting a little bit.

It sounds like you guys are doing scrum in some form.

You just talk about just broadly the product development process.

Like how long do you or your sprints?

How long do you plan for in the future in detail specifically just like high level?

How does the product development process work?

So there are certain things that, you know, I learned at box and, you know, that inspired some things that we do at Miro.

And there are certain things that we've evolved.

So like one of the things that we've instituted is sort of, you know, our roadmap process, right?

So that's sort of the first thing around how the different teams are looking at, you know, the things that they're going to work on.

So we have a rolling six months roadmap.

It seems large, but we've got, like I mentioned, a number of enterprise customers.

And if I've learned one thing that large enterprises like is asking for a roadmap review.

So that tends to be my favorite meeting of sitting down with the enterprise leaders and walking through what we are working on.

So what we've done is we've tried to architect something which actually allows our customers to get what they're looking for.

But at the same time, does not remove the agility that is so important for us to deliver value faster.

And so what we do is we have a rolling six month roadmap that gets updated every three months.

And the first three months of that roadmap, we have an 80% precision level, which means that 80% of the things that we claim to be on the roadmap will get done.

That's the target.

And for the for the next three months, because it's six months, so the first three months is 80%, the

next three months is 50%.

So we have a much lower level of resolution in the next, you know, three months after that.

And what that allows the product teams to do is actually have flexibility, which is based on what the customers are asking for.

And based on what the competitive moves are based on some technology breakthroughs that happen around large language models, they can pivot and they can pivot and move towards that.

And they won't get penalized either by the customer or internally in terms of doing that.

So that's that's what we do.

And that's all on the backdrop of an annual strategy that we publish.

So every year, you know, we publish a strategy white paper that it gets published internally available to every single millionaire, you know, across all functions that clearly articulates, you know, the key bets that we want to make.

Why do we want to make those bets?

What is the expected outcome?

And how does that ladder up into the overall business outcomes that we're trying to drive from an OKR perspective, as well as the overall business strategy that we have.

So people take that product strategy, you know, white paper or artifact and then against that they're building their road maps which get updated every three months.

And then inside of of the teams, we, you know, enable teams to be quite autonomous in terms of some of the rituals that they're doing.

We want them, you know, to obviously embrace best practices.

We've got a team of agile coaches that, you know, share best practices are, you know, are available, you know, to help if there are certain specific, you know, needs that teams have.

And then I think like on top of that, there are certain key, like I would say, rituals that we do that maybe are unique.

So for example, we have something called as Miro Connect, you know, which happens every other Friday.

And, and, you know, every other Friday you, you know, for example, in our Amsterdam office, you can go in there and at four o'clock in the afternoon, you know, four to seven or eight and sometimes it goes really late.

You've got a bunch of product teams, you know, sitting around tables and it feels like oh, it's like a trade show or something and you just people are coming in.

They're having a good time.

You've got a drink in your hand.

There's maybe some light music playing in the background and you're going from table to table and you have teams that are actually showing all the amazing work that they're.

And it, it, you know, if done right, like it happens once in a while, but like if done right, it's magical in terms of the outcomes that you can get.

So I'll tell you, there was a team that actually was presenting at our Berlin hub.

And they were saying, we're working on this feature, you know, and there's an, you know, there's an engineer, you know, who walks over to that desk and says, what are you working on?

And the team describes it.

We were trying to do, you know, something like this.

And, and this engineer had actually worked on that particular problem in their, in their prior life, like literally they had implemented this.

So he says, so, so how are you going to implement this?

And the team, the engineer that's sitting there says, like, this is the approach I'm going to take.

And it's going to take me three months.

And he's like, oh, would you mind if I go and help you with this?

And they're like, sure, more the merrier.

Go ahead.

So this person, you know, you know, puts down their beer and says, okay, I'm having a good time.

Let me just head back to, to my home.

And in the next three or four hours goes and courts, the entire thing makes a pull request.

And next day in the morning, one of the engineers from this core team that was exhibiting at Miro connect, you know, looks at the pull request, you know, reviews the court and says, yes, something that would have taken, you know, three months for this core team because they didn't have the expertise,

literally got, got done in three hours because there was another engineer that ran into them and said, I know how this is done.

I can actually help you here.

And, and went ahead and ended the right thing.

And so we're trying to create these magic moments.

It happens once, once in a while, but we have one success story.

And I like to tell that in every opportunity that I get.

But that's another sort of sort of unique thing that we've done in terms of book ending things around how, how we operate here.

That story is like a dream for any PM.

Just imagine these saving months of work with the one conversation.

I imagine people were like, how do we replicate this on often?

I love that with the, these meetings just understand if their team is in Berlin, let's say, there's a screen there, like in front of a table and they're like talking through a screen like a video conference.

Yeah, I mean, like right now what we've figured out is that there is really hard to do these events, you know, over, you know, audio video conferencing and stuff.

So generally what happens is that you have an audio video bridge that's playing, but mostly it's people walking up to the respective teams and then having like a live conversation.

Like that's, that's usually how these things are operated.

Yeah.

Got it.

Okay.

So you have six month rolling roadmaps.

You have a yearly vision strategy for the company.

Two week sprints.

Is there also a quarterly OKR sort of process?

Or is it those or not?

There is.

Can you just talk a little bit about how that works?

Yes, yes, yes.

At Miro, we practice OKRs and, you know, it starts off at the company level.

And then, you know, those company level OKRs are taken by the AMP organization, like we described, it's the AMP organization.

And then we break it up.

And, you know, I would say like we have refined it over the period of time, the two years that I've been at Miro and, and early on, we were doing OKRs on a, on a quarterly basis.

And I would say more recently, we've actually evolved to six month OKRs.

And what we found was that, you know, six month was the right cadence in terms of giving enough time for teams to basically push forward in executing these OKRs and minimizing the quote unquote overhead of, of, of doing replan every single quarter.

And, and we found that it was much more effective and efficient for the entire organization to do it on a, on a six month basis.

However, we are doing traction on a monthly basis.

So every four weeks, as AMPed, you know, we are looking at our OKRs for the AMPed organization on a monthly basis doing traction.

However, the planning, the targets are done on a, on a six month basis.

I love how OKRs could just be anything like, could be every six months, could have objectives, could have key results.

Like it's just such a term that just applies to anything that people do with goals, basically.

That's true.

And it works. It's great.

That is so true.

And again, if there's any templates that your team could share of the way you do that stuff, that would be amazing.

I want to include that in the show notes.

Yeah, absolutely.

Because I think like, as you would expect, like we run Miro on Miro.

So, so there's like a lot of things that we could share as templates in terms of how we are running things on Miro, not just as OKRs, but in terms of product reviews.

And, you know, we have a ways of how we are doing asynchronous reviews combined with synchronous reviews.

And there's this blended experiences that we have.

And so we can, we can definitely share out to the community how we, how we do some of these things.

Awesome. And that's a great segue to another question.

I was going to ask is just what other tools, what's in the stack of the product team's workflow?

So Miro, obviously, maybe talk about like what you use Miro for, but then what else is in there?

Like what do you use for task management, bug tracking, things like that design?

Sort of starting from the bottom up, like infrastructure up view.

Like so we, all of our tickets are handled in Jira.

And, you know, we're using some of the Jira newer capabilities in Jira in terms of coming up with roadmaps and, you know, coming up with the priorities and stuff.

On top of that, the all of the specs, you know, generally get recorded in Confluence.

Having said that, we're actually a big fan of, you know, tools like, you know, Google Docs as well as Coda, you know, that allows us to track RKRs.

In a pretty effective way. You know, on top of that, obviously, like we use Miro a lot, I would say, for a lot of our things, especially on the product and design side of the team.

You know, generally, all of our insights get captured inside of Miro board.

So when we are going and, you know, conducting user experience interviews and stuff, we will record those.

And then those recordings get added to a Miro board.

So Miro acts as the content hub or a team hub for a particular project.

You know, once you capture all of those insights, then generally, you know, all of the brainstorming and, and team ideation happens on the Miro board as well.

So Miro is actually also used as a tool to facilitate meetings and workshops.

Once all of that, you know, is synthesized into a set of recommendations and outcomes.

You know, so when we go into these product reviews that we were talking about Lenny, the same Miro board then gets manifested into a set of presentations.

So we use Miro for presentations.

We've actually made some really amazing updates in terms of our capabilities there and folks haven't checked them out.

I would strongly encourage them.

So there's a capability called Showtime that basically abstracts out the UI and lets people focus on the content, but do it in a way that it's interactive.

So everyone that's on the call can can can have reactions, you know, can share their comments and leave comments while the presentation is happening without actually disrupting any of the flow for the user.

So we use that a lot for presentations as well.

And I would say more recently what we've started to do is that we've started to move some of our synchronous meetings into a sync review.

So I talked about this talk track feature that we have and a lot of teams, what they would do is that they would actually send you, you know, five minute, 10 minute talk track in advance.

And it's just a link to a Miro board.

You click on it and then you just sit back and relax, you know, and then you have this magical experience where you're sitting back and the Miro board is automatically moving because Lenny was like recording it like that.

And then you have the video play and then you can pause it anytime you can add in your comments and stuff so that the next time when you meet instead of actually providing context to everyone.

Those synchronous sessions are a lot more deliberate and focused on driving outcomes or achieving, you know, consensus.

So people are just focusing on the comments that were added as part of the async product review so that when they meet synchronously, they can use that.

So Miro boards are used for that as well.

And I would say now a lot of our dashboarding shows up in Miro boards.

Now we recently released data visualization capabilities around most popular BI tools.

So at Miro, we use Google looker a lot.

So a lot of our dashboards are in looker.

And what you would typically find is that our analysts team and product teams will just grab a link to a looker dashboard, put it on a Miro board and it unfolds into a full visualization.

And unlike a screen grab, you never have to go update it because right there on the Miro board, it's always updated and you can refresh that.

So you basically have this this this this experience where Miro acts as that single source of truth for a lot of the teams in across the entire journey of product development.

Where a single Miro board is is is meeting the needs of like multiple sort of use cases there.

And then for the road mapping is up in Miro, like the each teams roadmap or to use something like Jira.

Yeah, so I think like we've got a couple of tools for for road mapping and our observation is that while those tools are great for for for the unique needs that they're solving, we haven't found like a like a universal solution for road mapping.

So there are some teams that use Miro, you know, for road mapping and they would use the Kanban sort of widget in in Miro for that.

You know, what are they working on what's coming next what's in the backlog.

But I would say like it is a problem that is not completely solved in terms of how do we actually bring, you know, these these artifacts together at scale.

What we are starting to see and this is actually a unique use case of Miro is that we actually enable our entire field organization using talk tracks.

So what happens is that we have our entire roadmap published out as a Miro board for enablement purposes so that that's an artifact that is approved to be shown to a customer.

And what you will see is that you'll see five or six recordings in there.

And, you know, the leader for enterprise has done a five minute recording on everything they're working on the leader for platform has done that the leader for end user experience has done that.

You know, that the person who's driving some of our AI experience has done that.

And so you can go in and you can just click on that video and you can self serve sort of meet your needs by by using Miro and this capability that we have.

That's awesome.

And it sounds like each team can basically choose the tools they want to use.

There's not like standardized everyone needs to use Geron or Miro for their roadmap.

I like that.

I like how teams do that often.

Maybe one last question around the product org and then I want to shift a little bit to growth and how Miro grows and things you have learned about growing.

So question I always try to get to is how do you think about balancing new bets and innovation with

maintenance and just general like incremental work?

Do you have some sort of philosophy as a product leader broadly and then maybe Miro specifically have just like the how to balance investments in these two buckets and maybe three buckets, you know, bugs incremental work and then just big bets?

How do you think about that?

So, you know, we have some some rule of thumbs in terms of like how we want to allocate, you know, our investments across these buckets.

And I would say a lot of it, Lenny actually depends on sort of the state of the team.

Like there are certain certain teams that have more tech debt than others.

There are certain teams that are actually working on some really big zero to one features than other teams.

And so I think like there is a variance, you know, the standard deviation actually is dependent on like which part of the spectrum that you're in, which is are you a team that we believe needs to create the next generation experience on the platform.

And hence we have to prioritize innovative work or are you the team that's actually so critical to actually, you know, meeting our objective around like better board performance or any of the other things that we believe are important.

And hence we need to invest in those in those critical areas.

But I would say in general, you know, innovation versus not, you know, you know, varies on a spectrum of anywhere from 60 to 80%.

So I would say about 20 to 40% of the available capacity at any given time is either getting allocated to two architectural initiatives.

You know, there's a technology roadmap that our CTO is driving that we believe is extremely important as the platform scales.

And you know, now as you know, we have over 50 million people on the platform.

So we continuously have to invest in making sure that the platform can scale.

And there are certain teams, you know, that probably have 40 to 50% of their allocation towards that because they're critical part of the component.

And there are other teams that are maybe more end user focused and are more UI focused with that allocation is lower.

But I think general rule of thumb is 20% is always a given but it can go as high as 40 to 50%.

On bigger bets and longer term thinking.

Yeah, 20 to 40% goes on the technology related initiatives.

Oh, got it.

Like infrastructure maintenance, making sure everything's there.

Exactly.

And then what about just big long term bets that you're not expecting to pay off anytime soon?

Do you have a heuristic of just what percentage of say total resources you put there?

You've probably seen this, you know, the framework of like three horizon, like it's like Mackenzie and like Harvard School and so on and so forth.

Like horizon one business, which is what we're, you know, the thing that's delivering food on the table.

Generally, there's about a 70% allocation of resources that we have to overtake.

Then there is horizon two, which is an adjacent thing, you know, with the next 12 to 36 months, we believe it's material.

Usually that tends to be around 20% of the allocation.

And then there's horizon three, which is like three years out, you know, three to five years, you know, next generation things.

And that's about 10% of the ratio.

So it's like 70, 20, 10 across horizon one, two and three.

Awesome.

Any other thoughts along the lines of just how you think about product before we shift?

And I only have a few questions around the growth kind of story of Miro and what you've learned about growing.

In terms of like product leadership and like what, you know, what we believe is the way we want product leaders to be developed.

And I think it's like more of a people philosophy.

And so, you know, we have a product leadership, which is which constitutes of all of the folks who are running all of these streams.

And I always tell them that you have two personas that you have to think about everyone who's on the product leadership team is is a product leadership team member.

And the fundamental thing that you have to do is drive accountability.

So the number one thing that a product leader on the product leadership team needs to do is drive accountability with others in the product leadership team.

The other persona that they have is that they are a stream leader, they're actually responsible for delivering value for the respective persona and respective customers and stuff.

So when you put on the persona head of a stream leader, which is different than the persona of a product leader, your number one metric, the number one goal that you have is is drive improvement.

So when you go back and you work with your team, always have the lens, are you improving things and whatever you want to improve, but you always have to ask yourself.

Today compared to yesterday, tomorrow compared to today, have I improved things and that's the yardstick you should think about.

When you go sit in the product leadership team every Monday morning, every Monday afternoon at one in the afternoon when we meet together, your number one goal is actually to drive accountability around this.

And are you making sure that we as as leaders in the organization are doing the right thing for the for the company.

And I think like that's like a philosophical construct that I always remind people in terms of what they should be doing.

For example, tomorrow we have calibrations, we have our annual sort of review cycle happening in the company.

All this fun and so critical, you know, as a leader, because it sets the tone for everything that you're going to do.

And, you know, in my opening remarks, the only thing I'm going to remind everyone in the room is

that your number one goal here is to be a product leader and accountability is what you have to write.

Just hold each other accountable, including myself in terms of making sure that as we go in, like that's the key thing.

And I think like once people sort of understand sort of like the duality of how they need to operate across those two specific goals, it actually leads to two really high performing teams and teams that actually are able to create somewhat of a magic, you know, if they are open and there is trust that that has been built in the team.

And when you say accountability, what does that look like? Is it pointing out, hey, you didn't achieve this thing we were trying to achieve, or you didn't do a great job leading this meeting?

Is it just like direct feedback often, or is there some other way you see that manifested and what do you like to see?

Yeah, I think it's basically practicing feedback in a very open and constructive way and focusing on what is important for the business and not shying away from having some of those observations and conversations, you know, not shying away from that.

But it's all in the lens of like what is the right thing to do for the business. And if you feel that one or more members of the leadership team are not living up to what needs to be done than just voicing it.

And it's not like you're complaining or anything. It's just like, I have this perspective. Is this the right perspective or not? Because actually it ties very well with the overall cultural values that we have.

If you do things with the lens that you are being empathetic, then you pose it as a question as opposed to a statement.

And I think that's one of the things that we practice a lot at Miro is that I believe that I am seeing there are certain things that are happening that it could be just me that I'm not seeing the other things.

But what is it? Can you help me understand? Can you help me figure out that why certain things are happening? Because I might just be missing the perspective.

But because you bring it up and that's part of practicing accountability in an empathetic way, it actually gets the entire team in the right mindset, you know, in terms of how they operate.

Has anyone given you some sort of direct feedback recently or pointed out something you didn't do well that held you accountable that you could share?

All the time.

Yeah, all the time.

When we do our off-sites, this is actually a fun thing is that every off-site that I do with my leadership team, usually there's a one to two hour session.

It is feedback to Varone. And I actually do it openly. I will have about 210 people in the room and I will force people to be very honest.

And I want to show my vulnerabilities to everyone that I am not perfect and I have lots of areas to improve.

And every time people do it, it's interesting that they open up in very amazing ways.

And I think I love it because it helps me become better. It helps me identify my line spots.

But what it does is because I do it in an open way, it builds a lot of trust.

It brings trust that, you know, I do it openly and I'm an open book and they can share whatever they

want, not just with me, but openly in front of everyone.

Are you willing to share one thing they suggested that they pointed out that they wish you did differently or better?

Yeah, I think like in general, like finding time with me tends to be a bit of a hard thing.

And, you know, generally, there's always like this feedback which is like need more time, you know, maybe more responsiveness over email or Slack or something like that.

And that's an area that I'm constantly working on and improving. So, yeah.

It feels like a cop-out. Like that doesn't feel too painful to hear. I'm like, yeah, yeah, I know. I don't have a lot of time. I'm sorry.

And that comes back to your point about blockers and how important it is to unblock teams because that leads to a lot faster progress.

That's true. That's true.

Okay, so let me shift a little bit to Miro's growth and I only have a few questions here. I know it's getting late in your sites. I don't want to keep you too long.

Sure.

The first is something I'm on this constant quest to understand how companies got their first users. And I haven't actually heard the story of how Miro got its first thousand users or customers.

I know you weren't there in the early days, but do you happen to know how Miro initially grew and got their first thousand users or customers?

You know, I think like the fundamental thing there is that we always had like user first approach and reaching out to certain communities that were relevant to what was being, it was like a key part of lighting the fire, if you will, the proverbial way.

People to start to talk about the product and and given the collaborative nature of the product, you know, some of the early adopters invited people who were also early adopters and sort of the flywheel started to work.

You know, I've heard that we did a fair amount of content marketing and like, you know, listing the product on on sites like Captera sort of helped.

There was, you know, some early investments in terms of SEO and organic growth.

So, you know, there was a focus there, which was the main source of driving, you know, traffic, the top of the funnel came through that the product teams were very intensely focused on sort of building vital loops as a key mechanism of driving growth.

Once the traffic came in and every interaction that actually introduced barrier, you know, they looked at it and they looked at the data and they said, let's reduce this barrier.

Let's remove this thing so that, you know, the product could be effectively embraced and it was an evolution over a period of time.

You know, there was also the fact that early on in the journey, you know, some of the features were presented on a trial basis.

You know, and then later on, like sort of the model was evolved from from a from a trial basis time limited to a premium model that further sort of accelerated, you know, the growth for the business.

I would say like those were some of the approaches and that were taken to get to, you know, the first thousand users or so.

So you talked about how Miro grows, whereas this magical loop of I use Miro for myself.

Then I share it with my team and in whatever way I'm using it.

They're like, oh, Miro, this is cool.

Then they start using it and then they share it with people that they want to work with and increase this loop of growth.

And I imagine that's how Miro mostly grew initially and continues to grow.

Is there anything surprising or unintuitive about how Miro grows that is beyond that?

I imagine sales a part of it and we can talk about that.

But is there anything else that is interesting that is worth mentioning?

No, I think like that's the key of the growth.

I think there are like specific use cases where they are uniquely sort of geared towards inviting a lot of net new people.

So for example, Miro is loved as a as a workshopping tool.

And so generally one person is using Miro, but they invite 10, 15, 20, 50, 100, 200, 300 people to that workshop.

So there are specific use cases where people get introduced to the product and then go and sign up for it and then start to use it for that use case

or other use cases.

I think the other sort of accelerant in all of this is the templates that we have in particular, you know, the role that Miro verse plays in all of this.

And, you know, just to give you an example here, like there was a template, you know, which was created around FIFA World Cup, right?

So there's a FIFA World Cup diagram.

Cornelix, you know, he's the founder and managing director of a Canadian strategic service design consultancy firm.

He created this Miro verse template.

And, you know, it, you know, it had over 100,000 views and about 15,000 copies were made of the single template.

And, you know, you know, given sort of the popularity of all of this, like it actually got, you know, indexed by, by Google.

When you went into the search, you actually saw the Miro verse FIFA template show up when you were trying to search for, you know, FIFA World Cup.

And that was another sort of acquisition channel top of funnel that actually drew a lot of users to it.

So I think I would say, you know, the Miro verses is also like a key accelerant to this.

If you had to think about the pie chart of how Miro grows, what percentage roughly would you say is word of mouth organic versus what you just described,

which is essentially a CEO versus sales, outbound sales.

How do you think about this? Is there a way to kind of model that simply?

Without getting into specific numbers and stuff like I would say like fundamentally Miro is a product led growth company and product channels are one of the highest contributors.

For growth of users, you know, as the business has evolved, you know, to serve the needs of some of the largest corporations in the world,

you know, the enterprise segment and the enterprise persona when they're trying to provision Miro

for, you know, tens of thousands of users who then go convert, you know, conduct hundreds of thousands of workshops on Miro that invite like, you know, millions of users on the platform is a key part of the flywheel that we are seeing.

So I would say product channels are probably, you know, very strong and increasingly enterprise is a key part of that acceleration.

A great segue to our final question, which is the idea that you start a product like growth sounds like clearly it's a big part of growth today.

But as every product like growth company does eventually, you have a large sales team, I imagine. What have you learned as a product leader working with sales, especially at a product like growth company,

but how to make that relationship work and have a product work work effectively with its sales or there are sort of a few learnings.

And I would say maybe this is one area where, you know, we're working on like how we could be doing better in terms of bringing ourselves closer, you know, to our high touch and bring high touch closer to self serve in terms of how we operate overall.

You know, it's a lot of hard work, I would say, first of all, basically to bring these organizations together and you have to be very deliberate around the points of intersection and you have to make sure that, you know, these organizations don't consider themselves as competition.

Like, you know, it's one product, one company, it's just two channels of how we are serving our customers.

You know, there are some things that we've done, which is, you know, have the product marketing team, you know, that basically works across both of these functions and make sure that, you know, they are bridging, you know, what we are hearing from the sales organization in terms of what directly customers need on the enterprise side.

And then what do we need, you know, on the on the self serve side, you know, there's a full sort of process in terms of how the handoff happens across the maturity of the account, you know, it can start as a self serve, you know, it drives adoption and once there's adoption, you know, there's a hand raiser that happens and then there's a sales rep that gets engaged and you go through the qualification process and then you have an opportunity to expand the account.

So we've over the years sort of architected and like, you know, built the entire funnel and what the process is. And, and that's also sort of a key part of how all of this operates. But like I said, like I think like there are a few areas where we could we could further streamline how we operate and think of it as sort of one single unit.

I imagine that is true for every company out there. One maybe final question before we get to a very exciting lightning round. What are some features that people could look forward to that are coming with mirror?

We recently about a month ago announced, you know, Miro AI backdrop of all the amazing work that's happening around generative AI and large language models and stuff. So I think, you know, it was really, really exciting to see all of the the community enthusiasm around sort of the use cases that we launched.

We're going to be taking it across the finish line and doing a general availability in the in the coming weeks and months. So I think like that's one big thing and we'll be adding more capabilities there.

Just today, we actually announced a bunch of really deep enhancements and updates around how Miro can be used for team rituals and agile practices.

So now, you know, you can actually do perspectives in Miro where you can have a private mode where while Lenny's typing his feedback during retrospective, nobody else can see it.

And then one click, you can reveal it. And I just saw some of the results of the feedback and it was like rated as the number one feature people saw.

There's also some deeper integrations in terms of bringing an entire program board from from JIRA to start to do dependency mapping inside of Miro in a in a fun and collaborative way to use this dependency mapping along with

program board to start to do PI planning program program increment planning, which is essentially scrum of scrums or break room planning that's happening.

So there's some really amazing capabilities that we've added there, which is on the backdrop of some of the updates we've made in terms of, you know, estimation of sprint story points and so on and so forth.

So now there's a whole plethora of capabilities and apps that are available as part of the platform that allow you to have your entire team, you know, conduct your team rituals in Miro and you can automate certain things.

You can streamline things. You can do certain things in Async and then do the rest in synchronous ways. So I think like that's been a big update as well.

Amazing. With that, we've reached our very exciting lightning round. I've got six questions for you. Are you ready?

Yes.

All right, let's do it. What are two or three books that you have recommended most to other people?

One is I love this, When Breath Becomes Here by Paul Calanity. You know, it's like one of those really emotional books that at the end of that you might have tears in your eyes.

We're really, really amazing. We talked about Frank Soukman's Amped It Up and then Satya Nadella's Hit Refresh and I think like philosophically, like some of the things that we talked about today, you know, are inspirations that I found in some of these books.

What's a recent favorite movie or TV show?

Ted Lasso. I don't know if it's a recent one or not, but like something that I've enjoyed a lot. I think it's like a very positive and uplifting message.

You know, I think the performance is huge. It's humorous. You know, the characters are well developed and you know, so I think like overall, it's a treat, at least for me to watch.

What's a favorite interview question you'd like to ask?

I actually ask a math problem. So for those of you who interviewed with me, I have this math problem which is based on how Adobe created its first creative suite bundle.

And I was actually part of the team that came up with the pricing and packaging for the first creative suite post acquisition of Macromedia.

And it's a math problem that allows you very quickly to sort of figure out people in terms of their problem solving skills.

And usually like I give that problem to people. I've given it to like, I don't know, seven, eight hundred people.

So I now have like a very well established standard distribution of how long it takes for people, where do they get stuck and where they've gotten stuck.

For those people I've hired like what evidence do I have in terms of like using that as a framework in terms of them being able to solve things.

So that's that's my favorite question.

And so you're saying you've mapped back people that have done a certain way on the problem with their success and you've kind of found that it's a good signal of their performance.

Yes, not not directly, but like yes, correlation and stuff.

That's amazing. That's like one of the biggest problems with interviewing. You think you're asking all these amazing questions and it's such a good signal.

You have no idea. No one goes back and is like, oh, this person sucked this person didn't. So that's really cool.

They have that much data on that one question. Two more questions for you.

What's something relatively minor that you've changed in how you do product development that has had a tremendous impact on your team's ability to execute?

We talked about some of that like sort of removing the roadblocks. I think like having this motto of like, you know, create customer value faster with high quality, just the simplicity of that.

And you know, it's actually part of our evaluation rubric. It's part of how we measure ourselves and stuff.

So I think like just coming up with these simple concepts that you can rally the organization around and I think it's still work in progress, but something that I believe is leading to positive outcomes.

Final question. What's your favorite Miro template?

It's the FIFA World Cup actually. I am so like fascinated with what was done. Yeah, it's the latest one, but I think like there's a bunch of them in terms of retros as well.

And I think like your template as well.

Amazing. We will link to all of those Varun. This was amazing. Everything I expected and more your team is as interesting and unique as I thought.

And I am excited for people to learn from you. And we're going to share a lot of links alongside this episode in the show notes.

Two final questions. Where can folks find you online if they want to reach out and learn more? And how can listeners be useful to you?

Thank you, Lenny. It was a lot of fun. I enjoyed our interaction.

And you know, you folks can find me online on LinkedIn. I think that's probably the best way to connect with me.

And I think like in terms of, you know, one or two things I can ask everyone is that one is if you are an existing Miro user and you use the product for something interesting.

I highly encourage you to contribute it as a template as part of Miroverse. There's a lot of folks who use that and we would love for you to contribute there.

And the second thing is, you know, I know a lot of product development teams, PMs and designers, you know, are big fans of you Lenny.

So those are also the users that use Miro. So if there's anything we could do to make the product better, if there's things that you feel like we can expand the platform into, we would love to hear

from you.

And you know, just reach out to me directly over LinkedIn, direct message or connect with me there.

And yeah, and let us know. You're here to see me.

Varun, thank you again for being here.

Thanks Lenny. Awesome.

Bye everyone.

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