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TRANSCRIPT

Chris Catania on Community Leadership

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

community, leadership, esri, teams, data, building, leaders, companies, articulate, industry, customers, communities, externally, maturing, trend, partnerships, lead, talking, perception, align

**SPEAKERS**

Anne Mbugua, Chris Catania

**Anne Mbugua** 00:02

Chris, if you could introduce yourself and what you do.

00:07

Yes. Chris katanya. And I'm Head of Community at ESRI. So I lead our lead our strategy or our customer community.

**Anne Mbugua** 00:15

So, Chris, tell us how you're thinking about leadership and how that affects your community work?

00:21

Yeah, yeah, great, great question. I've thought about this in a couple different ways, actually, actually three different ways. So as we leadership engagement, so the engagements of key stakeholders internally, so like our executive stakeholders had a product, how to support like those, those types of people, and they're, and they're in their teams. So you know, engaging them at that leadership level. And then the second piece that we think about leadership is with our actual community, our customers. And, you know, we think about the one 990 It can be management like our one percenters, you know, that are helping to answer questions and an advocate for Azeri. Within the community. So we have an MVP program that we that we do at ESRI, and that's very intentional. So we think of building them as far as leadership. And then the second piece is really my community, team and organization. Making sure that we can be a good example of best practices for community building strategy, development, all kind of stuff, both internally and externally. So we want to, we want to be able to continue to set the standard for community building at ESRI, and help help share best practices make community as valuable for all of ESRI, because we do a lot of community building. And then and then externally. So we have a lot we have a lot of experience on our team. And we've been fortunate to be very successful in what we're doing. So we want it we want to share back that's so So helping our team to lead, lead other other teams and inspire them so so kind of a kind of a three prong approach there.

**Anne Mbugua** 02:01

Right. So tell me, what jumped out at you in the leadership data from this year's State of community management research?

02:12

Yeah, yeah, lots of things. I think I wanted to read in read into some things. One of the things was that it was it was really good to see that more communities are creating leadership programs, I saw a solid increase in the percentages with that. And that to me means that community leadership programs become more of a core elements to programs, which is which is great to see. And that there are you know, more formal programs being created. Versus ad hoc, I saw some of the data over time has gone down on the ad hoc and on the on the formal, which is, which is really good. And to reiterate the point that I made earlier about what we're doing at ESRI, what leadership means to us is that when I see that, that research, it showed me that companies and community teams are investing heavily more heavily in that 1% Because that 1%, just like the 8020 principle in business, you know, most of your, your business comes from your 20 80% of your revenue and profits come from 20% of your customers, right? So you should spend focus on that. 20%. For us, we focus and and it's important to see that other companies are not focusing on the 1% of communities, which is the customers that answer questions and help advocate and things like that. So, so it's good to see that they're investing in the power of that one of the of the one of the one of the one 990, which is which is great. Other things that I saw, I don't know, if it's completely, you know, able to derive anything out of it, but the impact of COVID on on community, because they know that and kind of the perception of community and the value of it to to leadership, executive C suite type audiences, I saw some of you know, an overt, a strong overall perception, you know, the positive, the very positive was, was, had increased. And that's where the majority of that is, I saw some uptick from 2020 to 2021 You know, over over the years. So, that that was good. But just overall the, you know, without even COVID In the picture, just seeing that the the impact of the positive perception of community has has increased, you know, the negative or neutral or very negative was was light and it was it was heavier on the positive so, so that was great to see. Some things I again, you can't necessarily decide or derive out of it but our community managers can be can be builders can be leaders that companies getting better at explaining and being able to articulate and align the value of community with the business needs. Whether it's product support, advocacy, marketing, you know, using community to, to show the value of that, I would like to say that yes, that is impacting it, but hard to say. But it is potentially one thing that is that is happening, I know through my own my own career, being able to articulate the business value of community certainly helps when you can do that, at the C suite level and articulate to leaders that this is what community can do, and they, they have an idea of that they buy in, and then they, you know, they support it with resources. And the perception of that is, is beyond just, oh, people are just talking together or communities and afterthought, right. And now, when I see the data like that, that that's, that says, A, I think can be managers can be builders are getting better, hopefully, at being able to articulate that, and the message is being well received. And, and understood by by the by that audience. Oh, yeah, other other things I saw. So there's a, there's a strong alignment, you know, between the customers and the, in the community leaders. So I think that was I saw some data that was that was really good with that. And I think that's important, just because of the, the strong alignment that that's been happening lately with, you know, the intersection of CX and, and community and being able to have those come together, I don't think you can ever go too deep with communities and customers, that relationship is needs to be grown and nurtured. And so I saw some good alignment with with that. The other day, I saw copper opportunities that, you know, the things I was talking about, up until now I think are good positive things. And I think the opportunities in the data that stood out to me is to be able to

06:54

include and grow more internal community champions, there was a little bit of a less percentage on internal leadership, writing, enabling staff, you know, with the tools or the know how, or the understanding that they can be champions, that they can be leaders with that, at ESRI, we've spent a lot of time a lot of time on specific projects, to help onboard staff into community so that they understand how committee fits into their role. So I saw a percentage that was a little bit low compared with external champions. So I think there's an opportunity to build the internal side. And then the other the other part, I saw that the opportunity to align more, you know, with maybe teams that don't necessarily understand community quite, you know, succinctly or broadly, like, marketing teams, obviously, there are some communities out there that align into into marketing, but, but just being able to articulate community at a deeper level, I think with within teams like marketing, being able to articulate how something like Account Based Marketing, and how community can help Account Based Marketing, meaning, you know, help community to help with retention, renewals, and deepen the relationships. So just being able to articulate that and just align with teams that maybe aren't as, as aligned traditionally, you know, we have community fits really well, with support, right, it's pretty well with product. There's some other teams out there that aren't necessarily thinking, thinking in those terms. And, and that's what, again, I'm just kind of speaking from a little bit from our roadmap, where I want to focus it as and have that and that's, that's one of those one of those areas. So those are, those are some things that I've learned.

**Anne Mbugua** 08:40

So Chris, this is a good segue, actually, because what advice would you have for a community professional starting to dig into leadership at their organization?

08:49

Yeah, yeah, I think, um, yeah, great, great question. I think, you know, there's, there's always the, you know, the context, right, you know, if you're new community, right, if you're more, you know, maybe medium or sort of advanced or you're starting to mature, right? It's, it can, it can be overwhelming, for sure. But with the things that I would think about, you know, if you're starting out, or even if you've, you've you and your journey, you know, is to always start with a concept of shared value, and how, how is the audience that you want to connect with? Like, what are the what are their needs, you know, how were where are they at? And just think of, you know, not what, you know, they can do for community, but make sure that you lead with, you know, how can Community Help Help them you know, whether it's the obvious things Oh, yeah, we can reduce costs, you know, or we can help improve product you know, I'm doing that so leading with leading with value in knowing what's valuable to leadership, you know, understanding your business, you know, your your your overall you know, what your company wants to do, you know, the roadmap, things like that, being able to articulate the community l Minutes and how they, how they fit and help with that. And then measurements, I always, always stress this, it's really hard, especially if you're engaging in a topic leadership, you need to have a plan to be able to, to measure and, and articulate. And that's just show a bunch of numbers on a spreadsheet necessarily, or PowerPoint, the appeal will tell a story with with that, and be able to balance metrics numbers with, you know, the story with the heart, right with the company mission and show how that and be ready to pick out the most important metrics that match for your companies that meaning your journey, right? Different companies, and different leaders, you know, get interested in different types of community metrics, you want to give them a little bit what they're looking for. So that you can you can maintain their attention, but then be ready to show them a little bit more. And to guide them down that journey. You know, for example, not just having, you know, showing growth metrics, right. Like, how many people are in the community, you know, that's great, I think that's the show, if you have a big community, and they leadership just wants to see growth, you want to see it go from zero to 1000, or zero to 200,000. Great, show that, but just be ready, or time, depending on, you know, when the right time is to show, you know, registrations and retention, and show how registrated registrations in the community are helping to renew, you know, product, software renewals, and tie those two together, that's the kind of storytelling that I was talking about. With that, so again, and then also look for partnerships across the community, look how you can partner build allies, within leadership, so that you can work closely with them, and then they can go forth with your message. And they can, they can be able to, you know, essentially speak your message without you in the room, and be bought in to that. So, you know, whether that's building partnerships within support within products, within marketing, different things like that, you know, working with leaders, and then working with their teams, you know, building trust, showing quick wins, things like that, it all, it all builds into into that, and kind of ladders up to that theme of leadership, and that the data we were talking about earlier, you know, what's the perception, you know, if you can get the buy in of the teams, that you want to, you want to get the buy enough, and then, you know, they they go forth, and they talk to their leadership. And, again, that's kind of been our, our journey. EZRI is working with the teams and then you know, their leadership sees it, and they, and they, you know, they, they start to transform it and their perception starts to lead. So let's partnerships are a really key, you know, don't, don't try to influence leadership necessarily, in a silo. And then from the from the customer side externally, one of the things I would suggest is, you know, is always to listen, you know, include your leaders, your leaders, your external MVPs, power users, whatever, whatever you might call them, you know, include them in the elements of your strategy, include them in listening session surveys, things like that along the way. Don't wait to, you know, fully fully baked the cake to bring them into the kitchen, right? I guess. Let them let them sprinkle some chocolate chips, you know, in there and mix the spoon around, right or whatever, whatever analogy. You want to you want to use, I'm getting hungry.

13:35

But your partner pardon, partnerships. And then, you know, the other the let the last thing for that we begin to show just know that, you know, teams are you know, they're watching, they're watching coming. So you'll be able to lead the way in, in how community is perceived. Don't just look at your community, in a sense of you just leading community, but you can you can help to influence leadership from how products developed, you know, how customers are engaged, how the renewed or retained sounds like that. So

**Anne Mbugua** 14:17

that's a really good advice, Chris. You know, and really good tips. So I'm curious, how have you used then the state of community management research and your community work?

14:29

Yeah, yeah, we've used it in many, many ways. Specifically here when I was at ESRI or even even before, but when I started the build the program here, I used the state management research, to show trends to show what kind of team we needed to build that would match the business needs of of as resold the skills framework to the maturity model to to where the industry was at. I would do onboarding sessions. Internal Role tours. And I would pull out data from from the research and use it in my slides to really show and help educate internal leadership and staff. Here, here's where we are, here's where we need to go. So it helps to. To do that. I've used, I've used data to get buy in, you know, if I needed to expand that team, or if I needed to get additional resources, or migrate a platform, whatever it is, we've done a lot of those things over the years here at ESRI, and I've used them I've used the research to, to validate our process, I've used it to benchmark, make sure that we're we're on the right path. You know, we're a b2b software tech company. So we want to make sure that we're aligned with other similar sectors, similar, similar industries. So it's been helpful to see that. And I've also used the research to show how other leaders that other companies, not just committee leaders, but how other leaders are talking about that. So, you know, from from time to time, there's information in the state committee management that talks about, hey, this leader at this company is doing that. I pulled those quotes out, or, or share those anecdotally, with my leadership team, so that they understand that oh, yeah, you know, we can align with other leaders or we had as we can be, we can be a leader. And that, again, that that resonates with with leadership, when they can show that we can, you know, be better than our competitors, right? What leader doesn't wanna do that? Right? So I've used that and pulled it pulled it from that. And then trends, yeah, just looking forward, you know, building our roadmap, I want to make sure that our community is on on the right path, and be able to forecast into the future. A lot of what I do and our team does is forecasting, what do we need to do is what we're doing for the future, right? past five used to stay can be management to forecasting and potential roadmap decisions.

**Anne Mbugua** 16:59

Right. So I'd like to end on this question. What else? Are you excited to read in this user? Boy?

17:07

You Yeah, yeah, one big word that really has been standing out for me lately, is scaling. And operationalizing. A big trend in the community industry now is more teams are adding committee operations, just like other parts of the company, have, you know, your marketing operations, and all these different things will community is is maturing, and I'm excited to see how that data is showing that trend. Because we're definitely experiencing that here. I've seen it in the industry, whether it's proliferation of community jobs, job titles, or changing things like that. So I'm really curious to see how the data is going to help us understand how we're scaling, and then also how we're maturing as a as an industry, you know, being able to look at and say, oh, you know, are we getting better at understanding the language of business and incorporating business into our community building, and, and vice versa, you know, understanding, you know, how to talk about, you know, ROI, you know, how to talk about product development in the context of how community can can do that. So wanting to see that. And then there's also a trend of wanting to see more, and there's been some other, you know, other reports that have come out that, you know, communities, unfortunately, a few small amount of small percentage have connected the community to their CRM, or something like like Salesforce. And that is such a, that's a such a critical step. It's an advanced step, but I think it's unnecessary kind of next step for our industry is to be able to do that, because you can't really track retention renewals impact the community, you can't track the impact of community retention renewals. If you don't have your CRM connected. Granted, you could do a lot of manual work, but but to be able to see how we are maturing as an industry, I think a lot of that will show up in in the, you know, is your community data connected to your CRM, right, that's a sign of maturity. So I'm interested to see, to see that, to see the influence of community post COVID We, you know, we're, well, I guess we're in postcode, but now I don't. But it's just I know, in 2020, a lot of communities either folded or they grew, right, companies either double down on the community investment, or they cut a loose, right. I think that's, that's one thing I'm interested to see, as we get a little bit further from 2020 When the pandemic hit, to see how that is happening. I could see a little bit of that in the data. But I think those are those are the things you know, to see how in a, you know, in a post COVID environment, all about has has happened within any industry sector or within companies and not just if if they've doubled down, but how did they do it? If they other team, did they migrate? Did they invest today? Like what did what did they do? You know, those those types of things didn't serve to see, to see trends with that. And those are, those are all the things. Oh, just the the last thing is that, you know, how can we take advantage of the opportunity that we have today in the, in the, in the industry are looking at the data, I definitely see that we have, we have the eyes and the ears. And it looks like we have the heart of leadership. No, they, they are now going Oh, wow. Okay. But this is important. Now, granted, we're talking about the companies that double down on their efforts. But maybe we can bring back some of those. But just overall, I think we have a great opportunity to show value of community. And I think that hopefully that's a takeaway from looking at the leadership data to saying Oh, yeah, this is something that we can we can now do, and how to and most poorly. How do we do it?

**Anne Mbugua** 21:04

Yeah, exactly. I really love those questions. Thank you so much, Chris for your time. I really appreciate it and I will stop the recording now.