Project Management Tools for Software Developers

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CEOCFO: *Ms. Shojaee, what is the idea behind Axosoft?*
Ms. Shojaee: Axosoft builds Agile project management software for software developers. The company was founded in 2002 when we developed a tool for frustrated project managers and developers. We saw an opportunity to create an easy-to-use tool that also integrates Agile development methodologies like SCRUM and Kanban. Development teams need something that is easy to get in and out of so they don't waste time. This is crucial in the software space. Also, the software is robust enough for CEOs and other C-level suite stakeholders to see what is happening in any area of the development process at any time.

Axosoft has developed into something much more over the years. It has become a leader in workplace culture and has been able to attract and retain amazing talent by focusing on people, ideas and fun.

CEOCFO: *Many companies are in your space. What do you understand about providing software tools that perhaps others do not?*
Ms. Shojaee: Because we make software for developers, our own development team uses Axosoft to actually make Axosoft! This allows us to understand who is using our product, as well as who is buying our product.

Developers will not use a product if they have to spend a lot of time working in it; this distracts them from actually writing code. However, development product/project managers, as well as CEOs and other stakeholders need to know the progression of their projects, whether it will be on time, how they need to plan for it, what the budget is and all the other ancillary steps and details that surround the process.

We build a tool that allows developers to simply go in and come out in of it in a minimal amount of time. They get all the information that is required for everyone in the organization to be able to make the right decisions. This takes place with the developer spending a limited amount time in there. That is what sets us apart, as well as the fact that we are a customer-centric company. We operate in a space where most of our competitors do not even have salespeople or client support who their clients can speak to. We have people who will help you no matter what level of need you have. We make sure our customers are successful with our tool and we will pull the plug if we think that our tool does not fulfill their needs.

CEOCFO: *Did you understand that support and customer centric concept from day one or did you realize as you went along that it was a differentiator?*
Ms. Shojaee: We have always offered support and ensure our customer's success. In recent years, we've come to recognize the significance of it. Support is something we have always offered and we encourage customers to take advantage of. We have always offered customer success as well, although recently, we have realized that is a true differentiator. That is what sets us apart as far as what the market needs are. We offer this very robust tool used by very smart people, however, it needs some time to onboard, learn how to use it and customize it to your needs. We also advise getting their existing data into the product in order to get the maximum benefits out of it.

Support and customer success are very different things. Support is a reactive response to what is going on with a customer, where our customer success team has a proactive approach. Before there is an issue, we solve it. We make sure that everyone is successful with our software. We started this company because we wanted to make a dent in the world. The tools we provide and the people who use our software are doing amazing things. NASA uses our product and

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is doing amazing things with it. It gives us pleasure knowing that we are providing a tool that makes their life easier and they are changing the world with it.

CEOCFO: *Do developers care that the other parties can easily see what is going on? Are you getting attraction from the CEOs or the financing people and others involved and they are bringing it to their developers?*
Ms. Shojaee: Our tool provides everything for everyone responsible for the team. To answer your question if the developers want a tool like this, the answer is yes. We are an Agile tool, so we build our tool on Agile methodology, which uses SCRUM. It is a process that allows developers to be far more efficient at developing with smaller release cycles. This means when you are building a piece of code, you are not taking six months and then in another six months you realize it's either too late for the market, not good enough, or it is too buggy. Our sprints are within three to sometimes a maximum of six weeks; therefore we know very efficiently and quickly if the piece works, if it is good for market and what we need to do with it.

Because of our tool's layout and a burn down charts, developers are able to go in the tool once one piece of their project is completed and simply pick up another piece on their own. They do not have to wait to be assigned to it. If a project manager decides that they want to assign it to a certain developer, they can do that, however, in Agile methodology, typically the developer will take a piece of code from the work log that they want to work on and go with it. This provides an enormous amount of flexibility for development teams. This is when the buzzword, "innovation" comes into play. You cannot be innovative on demand. When you provide a tool that allows developers to go pick up a project or a piece and work on it based on when they feel inspired, this allows them to be innovative, and this is what we pride ourselves on. The dashboards and layout in our tool present graphs, numbers and burn down charts suitable for what everyone—including executives—in the organization needs to see. Our tool keeps track of the progress as well. Developers like using it and upper management also loves getting the insight the tool gives them.

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CEOCFO: *How do you reach prospective customers?*
Ms. Shojaee: We are a SaaS company. We do not participate in cold calling. We have never in the history of the company ever done any cold calling. Our marketing is efficient enough. We target the market and all of our leads come to us. We have a heavy presence at conferences and are active within the community; therefore people come to us. Because we are a SaaS business, if a customer wanted to go through our entire product line and purchase without ever talking to someone, they can also do that.

CEOCFO: *You have had several versions. What is different today? What have you changed as you have moved forward?*
Ms. Shojaee: We are a twelve-year-old company and with anything in life, as you grow up, you become more comfortable in your own skin and space. At this stage of our company's growth, we are really aggressive about who we are and how we want the community to see us. We happen to be in the tech space in Arizona, which is not very well known for tech, yet we have great talent. We stand out making sure we are a culture-first company and we are no longer shy about it. Now we feel that we have built such an effective model that we want to share it. People need to know. We have everything from a happiness department to seven-minute movement sessions to things like a necklace wall. While they are all small, it shows how much we value females in our workspace and overall, how much we value the people here.

We really make that work/life balance happen. We do not just say it or talk about it--we make sure it happens. We have a private group of newsletters that do not go to our customers. We advertise to our family. Right now we are doing a charity event for the company. We are collecting some essentials for people in the hospital. It is great when employees know, but we have newsletters that let the family know that we are running a charity or doing a company 5k, or a 90-day challenge (we actually are doing one right now) where we are working on our personal goals. We have a happiness director who is a nutritionist and a health coach—this person helps you put these things together and helps you guide yourself. We let families know about that so you are definitely involved.

We do not think that working 9 to 5 should separate you from your family. We open our twelve fitness classes that we have on site to not just our employees but their families as well. When you grow up and are comfortable in your skin and want people to see it, we show it and mean it and live it. Innovation happens when you actually do that. It is not on

demand. Many people use it as a buzzword but we truly innovate because we are able to capture that innovative moment by providing so many opportunities to release stress and really be functional.

CEOCFO: *What might be different a year from now at Axosoft?*
Ms. Shojaee: We will be growing even faster than we are now. Our "It Was Never A Dress" campaign is something that went viral we are really proud of it. I anticipate this platform moving us forward. I used to be the only female CEO within the tech space in Arizona; I see this campaign helping to open more doors for females entering and moving up in the tech industry. We believe we will get there.

CEOCFO: *Why choose Axosoft?*
Ms. Shojaee: We are the company that cares. We care not just about our customers but our employees. It is holistic tool. We are better than the competitor not just because of our tool but how we build it. We are holistic.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

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