



Stanford eCorner

Organic Origins of Design

Stewart Butterfield, *Slack*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3563/Organic-Origins-of-Design>

Entrepreneur Stewart Butterfield describes how Slack grew organically out of a need for a tool to improve in-house communication and coordination, not necessarily as a premeditated product intended for the market. "Just like any other business, most of your daily effort is in communication," Butterfield says to Andrew Braccia of Accel Partners.



Transcript

We didn't know it at the time, and it wasn't obvious. And this wasn't obvious, I'm thinking, until like a year ago. In this very non-self-conscious, nonspeculative way, we were designing Slack. But based on the actual needs that we had as a team that was distributed, needs that we had as a team that was deep in technological development, that had a big degree of coordination. Because working on the game, we had artists and animators and sound designers and level builders. And we had people making content pipeline tools to bring all that stuff together. And just like any other business, most of your daily effort is in communication. No matter what your job is. So your job might be doing stuff in Excel or might be doing stuff in an IDE or doing stuff in Salesforce or whatever your role-specific function is. But most of the time is someone telling you what you're supposed to be doing.

You attending a meeting discussing what you're supposed to be doing. You reading or writing email about what you are doing. And just that need to coordinate people is a really big part of how we work. So this is kind of the good news and the bad news, is after a couple years we have some insight into why it was successful. The bad news is that that's a hard thing to replicate, to be able to actually design something while not actively thinking about it. But it's definitely the best way. Because I think one of the biggest problems that software designers, product managers, entrepreneurs have is the temptation to be really speculative with what some hypothetical person would want, as opposed to something that you know you need.