

ResearchOps Podcast, Episode 8, Andy Garber-Browne

Hello and welcome to the ResearchOps podcast, an initiative of the ResearchOps community. I'm your host for today Brigitte Metzler. I'm one of the co chairs of this huge global volunteer run community. As always, I'm assuming if you're listening, then you might know a little bit about ResearchOps, the mechanisms and processes that set user research in motion. If you'd like to know more about ResearchOps, you can find us at our website, researchops.community, or on our medium publications in English, French, German, and Portuguese. You can follow us @teamreops on Twitter, find the group on LinkedIn, and join in the conversation at #researchops. We're recording a special series of the ResearchOps podcast in preparation for the ReOpsConf2022. A partnership between learners and the ResearchOps community. The conference is in New York City on Wednesday, June eighth. It's not far away. So today we'll be speaking with one half of the brilliant community tools census project. Andy Garber-Browne. We will catch up with the fabulous Dr. Carolyn Morgan for a chat at the conference. Or we hope to invite Carolyn along to the podcast once this huge project is launched. Andy and Caro will be speaking about the tool census project at ReOpsConf where they'll be launching our brand new ReOps toolbox. So who is Andy Garber-Browne? Andy is vice president and design operations programme manager in JP Morgan Chase & Co's Global Technology Department. He supports an employee experience organization and works hard to make a few 100 designers and researchers lives better. Over the past 10 years he has worked for the firm's corporate and investment bank and the corporate line of business in creative roles. He has a passion for interaction design, user experience research and web development. A former US Army captain, he likes to say that he brings good order and discipline to the field of design. Also speaking at the conference will be Dr. Carolyn Morgan. Carolyn is a political scientist turned UX researcher who is obsessed with systems and processes. Currently, she uses those skills at Cisco, where she's working on malware protection software, and helping security practitioners protect their computers and networks. Prior to that, Carolyn drew from her academic experiences, both as a researcher and scholar to lead UX research projects at OCLC, a global library cooperative, responsible for WorldCat and publishing the Dewey Decimal System. I just can't even believe that it's it's so nerdy and so brilliant and so perfectly Carolyn. She can't wait to share the results of the 2022 results tools census, and introduce the plans ReOps has for future toolbox work. Let's turn now to Andy

Brigitte Metzler 0:00

Okay, and so today, as I said, we have the wonderful Andy Garber-Browne here with us. And welcome to the show. Andy, thank you so much for joining us. Thank you. Yeah, we're really excited to just see you and to hear you. Obviously, unfortunately, Carolyn Morgan is not able to be here today. But you know, I've been following along with your project in the Project channel for so long. And just it's a beautiful thing, seeing how wonderfully well you work together and

how you sort of bounce off each other. So I'm looking forward to kind of digging into that today. So I guess, to get started, and did you want to tell me a little bit about what's your, you know, We are talking about tools today. So what's your backstory? Like? what's the, what's your thing with tools? Do you ever think with tools?

Andy Garber-Browne 0:59

Yeah, I've always kind of thought that. You know, we don't scale good design by just adding more people. And I know that, like, really good tools and practices can, you know, make our design process so much more? So much better?

Brigette Metzler 1:18

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, for sure. And I didn't know. So tell me about your role that you have at JPMorgan Chase? Are you responsible for taking care of the tools side of things there at work?

Andy Garber-Browne 1:37

When I started working in design operations, perhaps like a year and a half, two years ago, it was a special project of mine. And, like, I've come to find out like many members of the research ops community that you have to go on a hunt tool for tools to go on a Tools finding project. Yeah, and not much information out there to support our needs.

Brigette Metzler 2:06

Yeah. Yeah. It's tricky, right. It always astounds me that we don't sort of just have the same kind of processes and approaches that we have to all kinds of user centred things like why do we not go and find the user needs? And then do the analysis? And then yeah, it's, it's a thing, right? So yeah, so tell me. So we have, we have a toolbox. Obviously, in the research ops community, it was one of the first things we had actually, because Kate Towsey, who founded the community had been working on her own toolboxes, she obviously had the same problem. And, you know, we know that tools is one of the most popular channels in the entire research ops community. So tell me, what was your experience of using that toolbox? When you came along to the community and found the toolbox?

Andy Garber-Browne 3:01

What was the first thing that I came and joined the community for at the recommendation of a colleague, and when I first found the toolbox, I was kind of overwhelmed and super impressed. You know, it's kind of like being dazzled by the sheer number of tools out there. As we know, the vendors in this space have been innovating so fast in the last couple of years, and the tools are just coming in. The capabilities are increasing so fast, that then really quickly, you know, we found that it was too voluminous. And perhaps it was really tough to maintain. And so quickly had to find out that it wasn't particularly useful, just because it had been aging as things do. So I had to try to find some other sources of information on the stuff that we really needed, you know, particularly working in a large corporation, like I do, and like many other people working in regulated environments, need a lot of other information. Yeah, what can work?

Brigitte Metzler 4:09

Yeah. So what are the key kinds of pain points that you see? When you're going and looking for tools? If you're working for like a banker, regulated kind of industry or, you know, like, I work in government? What are the pain points that you're seeing there?

Andy Garber-Browne 4:28

Yes. A lot of tools out there might be really good for one type of segment, you know, or certain kinds of certain kinds of industry or certain kinds of country or countries that you work in. And, obviously, there's a lot of information, just take the chat with the research ops community, really good information would just fall away into chat history. Yeah, you know, There's no curation involved. Gosh, there's like, so much untapped expertise in this amazing research ops community. And you're just like, oh, like, we need a robot to grab that stuff. And so like, let's make a robot. And then there's

Brigitte Metzler 5:19

Are you our robot, Andy?

Andy Garber-Browne 5:22

A little bit, I get accused by my spouse sometimes of like, kind of speaking mechanically. I'm working on it.

Brigette Metzler 5:32

So I have, I'll try not to jump the gun too much, because you've got your beautiful project. And, and I don't mean to infer that you're a robot in any way, shape, or form. But I know that you've been thinking really hard about how do we, you know, how do we make sure that it stays up to date, and, and all of that sort of stuff. And so I really want to kind of dig into that a little bit with you. But, um, so it's been a huge research project I watched in Caro go through that whole process of the research design, and it was just phenomenal. Do you want to kind of talk me through in Caro's absence to tell me sort of, what do you think? What were her primary things that she was trying to draw out of that research and trying to understand and grapple with? Yeah,

Andy Garber-Browne 6:19

You know, I think there's something I want to bring along here is a kind of an unexpected benefit of being involved in this project. And the community was, you know, I come from a UX design background. And Caro comes with a super strong academic research background, the two of us together, and it gets really interesting, like, I, we got a lot of therapy, when we would meet every week for a year, we would teach each other so many things. And so I kind of have been on my journey to learn more research practices. And I got to see an expert at work. And Caro, you know, so the way often I would kind of start writing in a research plan, and then she would take it and take it up to level 11. And when it came to writing a discussion doc guide, or it was really interesting, the way that she kind of recommended that we do the right thing. So you know, we all know a good user centred design practices, but she said, Let's do concept testing. Let's actually talk to the users. And it's like, does it make sense? Let's, let's do some interviews, you know, and let's, let's do it. It's at the earliest phases of the project as possible. And the two of us kind of encouraged us to keep going with that idea. So that's mainly what I that's, that's kind of the most unexpected, awesome takeaway of this project.

Brigette Metzler 7:57

Yeah, and I'm positive that she would say the same. It's, it's, you know, obviously, this has been sort of sponsored by Holly. And so I've just been sitting along the sidelines the whole time, just admiring the two of you and admiring both of your practices and the ways that you've been working together. And just, yeah, I would agree that it has just been beautiful to see that research design and that rigor and just the way that even just the the documentation of the project and how you've gone through it, and all of those sorts of things is really actually, I think, leveled up the community as well, in terms of our project practice, and, you know, no, that's not

going to not very exciting for our listeners, but it's very exciting for our community, I think, too. And I guess, what it reflects on in the end, is that, so in June, you're going to be speaking at the ResearchOps Conference, and, and you'll be unveiling this beautiful tool, with some beautiful visual visual design in there that I can't wait to talk to you about in a second. But what we'll know, as a community is that it's a project that is just 100% produced with absolute rigor the whole way through, and it's just so exciting about that. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So as I

Andy Garber-Browne 9:22

It's been, it's made by us for us.

Brigette Metzler 9:25

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And has it been, you know, I think you mentioned there are hundreds of tools, right? And the communities obviously, we try to be as tool agnostic as possible. Tell me about that. Was it hard to go through that process and, and to, you know, because obviously, you have to use tools to be able to do your research process. How's it been to sort of, has it been at all weird?

Andy Garber-Browne 9:58

Just kind of eye opening, because we had to take a little bit of our own medicine. And, you know, it's again, realizing hey, let's do this the right way, let's do a little design on ourselves and talk to each other before we select a tool have reasons. And there's the community itself already has certain tools that it's selected. And it's better to all use the same tool than to go for the latest new shiny one. Yeah, you know, yeah. And so I can tell you that one thing that's kind of been core to us is like digital whiteboarding has been really important for getting ideas out about the tool project really fast. And gosh, my absolute favorite is just starting with a Google Doc, you know, and just just get writing. And so that's been our main main means of collaboration with that multi cursor multiplayer experience has kind of been amazing to watch people who, like yourself, or Holly or Carol are really good at it is actually collaboratively writing either like in person on the zoomies, or asynchronously to watch just kind of something that started out so raw, just suddenly become really well thought out and structured?

Brigette Metzler 11:22

Yeah. It's amazing to watch, isn't it? So? So we've kind of covered some, some pain points, obviously, trying to work out what works in my scenario, what were some of the other other kinds of pain points or the kinds of things that you're trying to surface that in, in how you structure the toolbox? What are different ways that people might just give them maybe a hint? About what, what sorts of things the toolbox might contain maybe? Any ideas? Yeah,

Andy Garber-Browne 11:56

Well, the one really fascinating thing is how much we learned from the user interviews and concept testing that we did, and found these quick little wins and stuff that was so easy to do. So, you know, at times, we're sure we had to go for a super minimum viable product, but then kept hearing over and over again, how amazing it would be to have a web interface with filtering, to be able to click on the type of company or industry that you're involved in, and watch all the rest of kind of the readout of tools that fit immediately reveal themselves. So allow you to do a little bit of this visualization of the data right in front of you to get people excited about this dataset that Caro and I have created. And then one of the real exciting things is, and we found this from the interviews, too, we even have some members of our community who would skip the website entirely, and immediately just download the data and run. And so we wanted to give them that capability too so that the data nerds you know, like us, could just take the data and put it in their own spreadsheet, and, you know, do all that themselves. Yeah, we're really looking forward to some of our community members finding out new things and data analysis. Yeah, informed back into the project.

Brigette Metzler 13:30

Yeah, that has been one of the beautiful things. I know, for example, with the research skills framework, a couple of the community members have taken that and kind of gone, 'what about if we did this? And what about if we did that, and let's augment this tool?' So should we talk about data visualization, and it's been we had a lovely conversation about Sankey diagrams the other day.

Andy Garber-Browne 13:54

Going deep. Yeah, we did.

Brigette Metzler 13:55

We did. So tell me about have you got any, any particular favorites? Or tell me about the data via? Because I know you've been really getting into that

Andy Garber-Browne 14:07

It must have been way back. You know, like 8 or 10 years ago, I took a course at the School of Visual Arts, a little continuing education, in data visualization. I always loved it so much. It's magic. You know, we all, look, we love looking at these books. And so I developed some of these skills. But um, you know, nobody ever had a need for it's pretty advanced stuff. You know, it's not a skill you get to pull out very often because somebody might not be buying it, you know, we shouldn't do things that you know, if nobody needs it, you know, solving a problem. It is a problem people have because when you communicate visually, you influence people so powerfully. Yeah. Yeah. But to your question, I want to say that the one thing that I learned is, you know, we don't get fancy with data visualizations just for the sake of doing it. And so, one of my first steps is to do a, I call it like a scrapbook, you know, you know, the fancy term for it is like, comparable problem analysis, and bring in a bunch of mood boards have great data, visualizations and other people have solved some problems on a big canvas. And then honestly pick the kinds of charts and graphs that will most clearly communicate what's going on. You know, so we're gonna, we're gonna see a lot of bar charts, that's just because it is the most effective way of visualizing this particular data. And then when we have a chance to get a little bit of sizzle. And that's when we talk about that, like, I like to call it eluvial diagram, you know, just just something to break up the repetition, to put it put a little sparkle in to capture people's attention, you know, the eluvial diagram is comes from kind of small rivers that flow off glaciers, tiny little rivers that split or split by the land and then combine again. So it allows us to see how data flows through our different segments. So keep an eye out for that work. Beautiful. No?

Brigette Metzler 16:33

Yeah. So are you expecting that? You know, I think one of the interesting things about the community has been just the variability, how people kind of take a tool because they can use it, and then and then just try to get it to do something it wasn't built to do. And so you get these weird uses of tools? Are you seeing that much in the data? Are there other people doing all kinds of weird and wonderful things that we should all know about?

Andy Garber-Browne 17:04

Yeah, it's a lot of data to analyse. So I don't have any, like, really fun examples just yet. But

Brigette Metzler 17:12

We'll save that for the conference.

Andy Garber-Browne 17:14

Yeah, that for the conference, but it was the, the wide, the wide variety, and I was just amazed at both, like, you can kind of see it in the data. And you would definitely feel it in the interviews was just how amazingly brilliant our community is, you know, a lot of people have to make do with a lot less tools than we would hope, you know, so they are, they are doing super professional practices, and they are trying to bring all their best to, you know, with with limited resources. So what you'll find is people are using kind of unexpected things to do really, really great work.

Brigette Metzler 18:01

Awesome. And are we going to be able to see any of those results from the interviews in any detail at all? Do you think on the on the site eventually? Or will it be a tool tool, like a toolbox, where we can download the data and filter the data and all that sort of stuff.

Andy Garber-Browne 18:19

In the site, we're hoping for a little bit of editorial color to small, small, little snippets to kind of get people excited about connecting some insights. And then we're kind of really hoping that the community can help. Think about the next versions of this toolbox. You know, because this will be the most basic version, we'll be able to pick out a couple really interesting things that the data is telling us. But we'll really need the help of the community to find out even more about connecting sources of information about the way people are working.

Brigette Metzler 18:54

Yeah, yeah. And what's been your favorite part about doing the project in the community so far? Do you think that sort of the freedom?

Andy Garber-Browne 19:06

My, my, my favorite part has been a little bit of upskilling very early on. I did this donut round in the in the community chat, and got to got to meet so many of the board members, and it was Mark and I got to meet him and one of these donut rounds and asked him, the person about upskilling myself. I wanted to include more research into my personal practice. And through this project, I've kind of got to do that. So it's been really exciting. I got to be taking notes for Caro during a bunch of these interviews and concept tests. And I got to learn some new methods myself where I probably would have been taking notes in you know, a note taking tool or in a Google Doc or something like that. She recommended that we to layer the notes right on top of the designs. And, you know, and I hadn't done that before, but once we did, and I was like, Wow, this, this is like magic, you know, like really putting the insights contextually right on top of the mockups and wireframes we had done. Right. Ah, so I got to learn about new methodologies. And, you know, I can go on and on this, I talked about how I learned about good data governance. Wow, if I ever need a template for good data governance, you know, the research ops community has all the templates,

Brigette Metzler 20:39

We do, sorry we subjected you to that one.

Andy Garber-Browne 20:43

Yeah, that was that was exciting to see, hey, if this was done, right, what would it look like? Oh, yeah. Okay. There's so that I expected about 10% of what was how it was actually went into a good data governance strategy. But hey, there, there it is. Now it's done. And I know what good looks like?

Brigette Metzler 21:01

Oh, that's, I'm very flattered. Thank you for that, that I, you know, I think we were saying earlier to each other. One of the great things about the communities that you're not being paid, so you do have the, you can do as much or as little as as kind of as you want to. And, and because you can you can suddenly kind of go well, what would I do? What, what does good look like? Or what does this data visualization look like? And when could I use it? And has that been? Has that been sort of a little bit of liberation there for you as well? In the same way?

Andy Garber-Browne 21:42

Yeah. And then particularly, because we didn't pressure ourselves during this weird pandemic, to, you know, we gave ourselves the time we in space that we needed. And when one of us might have been feeling kind of stressed out, particularly, all of a sudden, they would pop up, Caro, again, excited about the project, and we kind of lift we would lift each other up. So I thought it was like, really amazing. And that way, our personalities really worked out together. And it we just kept pushing, you know, just because keeping work keeping working on it is going to is going to be the recipe for success.

Brigette Metzler 22:25

Yeah. Yeah. Well, it just sounds really exciting. I cannot wait to see you. In New York City. It feels it feels it's been a long, four years to you know, we've sort of all been so spread far and wide. And then we had the pandemic, and it just has been not really possible for anyone to get together much. So really excited to see you and Caro speak at the research ops Conference, which is on Wednesday, the eighth of June. So not very far away, folks. We hope to see you there. If you can't make it in person, we do have it's a hybrid conference, you can pick up a ticket anytime. But yeah, we're really hoping to see you all there. And will we actually see the toolbox in action, on the Wednesday?

Andy Garber-Browne 23:23

yes, if everything if everything goes well, the data will be flowing.

Brigette Metzler 23:30

Beautiful. I cannot wait to see it. Thank you so much for your time, Andy, and thank you for the contribution to the community. It's going to be I think, one of the most astounding things that we've produced so far, because I tell you what, who hasn't had a problem with finding the right tool? Right? Yeah. Yeah. Is there anything else that you wanted to say? Anything to wrap up?

Andy Garber-Browne 24:00

Oh, gosh, I just want to say it's been a pleasure being part of this community. In particular, for our community of such experts. It's been amazing to be welcomed as a newcomer to the field, and support for people who are at the beginning of their journey. And people who can have a home with like deep levels of expertise. So I've just kind of been welding up and taking super

notes for like, how do you guys do it? You know? That's what that's why I continue so excited to continue to be here for years to come.

Brigette Metzler 24:31

Yeah, likewise, I think you know, we just all embrace it with a learning spirit. We're all here to learn. And that means everyone's basically we're all there at the same table learning together. So thank you so much for your time me. I will see you soon.

And that's the end of today's podcast. Don't forget, you can find tickets to the ReOpsConf2022 at reopsconf2022.joinlearners.com. It's on Wednesday, June 8, in person in New York City or online. You can see Holly, myself, most of the ResearchOps board, our speakers and of course, others in the community at the conference. We're so looking forward to seeing you all there. And we hope you enjoyed today's podcast. If you want to hear more, please subscribe, or join us in the ResearchOps community. If there's someone you'd like us to talk to you please let us know. We hope you'll join us next time at the ResearchOps podcast. We'll see you see you soon in the Slack