



Innovation

THE BLOODLINE OF TRANSFORMATION

Innovation is something that is new and useful, this is a very simple definition. If its new, it is a creative innovation, If it is not useful, it's not an innovation”, precise words from Professor Linda Hill (Leadership, Globalisation and Innovation) at the 2019 Executive Forum organised by FUJITSU. It could be a product, a service, a business model, a way of organising, or a way of cutting costs, and it would belong to one of these two categories: **Incremental** or **Breakthrough**. Incremental innovations give organisations the ability to address their performance gaps, through them employees or team members create value and drive the organisation towards what it **'should be'**. An example of incremental is the “adoption” of a technology solution that reduces process time for a company's service or product. A breakthrough on the other hand is a new way of moving towards what the organisation **'could be'**, identifying gaps and taking opportunities to be a **'game changer'**. This is the path towards achievement of what you **'could be'** as an organisation and its characterised by the introduction of new products or services.

Innovation & Transformation Success Stories

It is important to strike a good balance between the two innovation categories in order to achieve any level of transformative change. The Japanese are a clear example of a nation that relentlessly worked to address their performance gaps and became game changers enough to transform their country. “The strength of Japanese companies was in their trust – based community, where their people made lifetime commitments”, said Ikujiro Nonaka, Professor Emeritus at the Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy at Hitotsubashi University.

Another excellent example of a well-balanced innovation mix is the Singapore Public Service Division, where government prioritised and facilitated the spread of innovation practices throughout its 145,000-person public service. The Public Service Division (PSD) — the central human resources agency under the Prime Minister's Office — has a Transformation Office and Innovation Lab that is charged with building innovation capabilities and mindsets across the entire public service. “Our job is to inculcate a culture of innovation for everyone in Singapore's government,” said Alexander Lau, **Principal Design Lead** at the PSD's innovation lab. “We're doing this by rethinking the innovation process.”

The most important aspect of the Singapore Transformation and Innovation process is the **Project Challenges and Goals** stage, which covers understanding stakeholder context and needs. A detailed breakdown of this stage includes analysis of project data patterns, scanning future trends, identifying cognitive biases, and most importantly contracting with project sponsorship and project teams. This is the most detailed and demanding stage since it covers a diverse range of stakeholders (citizens, the public service, businesses, investors, expatriates etc.) with various needs. It can only be a valid assumption that the Singapore PSD transformation office spends most of its resources building capabilities to address project challenges and goals. The driver of transformation is innovation. Achievement of any innovation is a function of rapid execution, with the aim of finding new ways of achieving better results. Singapore started from a low base from the 1960's and now is one of the dominant players globally in innovation as shown by always showing up at the top in global rankings.

Accelerating Transformation In Botswana

Botswana as a nation would like to see new phenomenal results delivered by Government, Private Sector and Non – Governmental Organisations. Like Singapore did, we can start striding forward by addressing project challenges and goals. The reason why the Singapore Transformation and Innovation Office starts with this step is to precisely diagnose their ailing parts of their ‘delivery machinery’ and prescribe the right cure for the ailment. Without understanding project challenges most efforts would go to waste, as guess work that never paid off. Transformation is a game of projects and as a result, we must deliver the right projects and must ensure that execution is undertaken rapidly. The most important currency of today’s world is time. The fruits of transformation are enjoyed by those who deliver with speed, conserving decades of work years by closing performance gaps, blending this well with building game changing capabilities such as interconnected online services. The talk now is of **10X** and even **100X exponential growth** by firms focussing on innovation!

During the journey of transformation, almost all governments identified a common pattern: Without exception, the government making the most progress had a comprehensive transformation strategy, **SUPERB** leadership, and an aggressive innovative funding model. These governments had a sense of urgency. Their strategies were anchored on a commitment towards programmes and project partnerships, rapid execution, and speed to market (the market is you, the people). The need for programmes and projects partnerships is even more urgent for three key reasons: Firstly, science, engineering and technology are evolving faster than ever before. Second, government is operating within an extremely vast ecosystem that includes many players (health care, education, investors, NGOs, communities, private companies, policymakers). Third, we are all trying to deliver for a “customer” that is on an urgent deadline: the people.

How can we fuel progress in Botswana?

Botswana continues to linger on the lower leagues of innovation as demonstrated by various global rankings including the World Economic Forum (WEF) Competitiveness reports. Without building strong innovation systems we can consider the Vision 2036 aspirations a pipe dream. To push transformation and inclusive growth closer to breakthrough, government should operate somewhere along what is called a ‘funder-doer’ continuum. On one end, we have ‘funders’: Government departments that raise money, call for investors & grants, and distribute funding — Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, Ministry of Trade, Investment, and Industry, Botswana Investment and Trade Centre (BITC) etc. On the other end, we have ‘doers’, who design and execute programmes and projects that support noble goals and build collaboration within the transformation ecosystem. Doers identify opportunities & challenges, and design programmes and projects that integrate the needs of citizens, industry, public service, and expatriates. For example, doers would design and execute a government digitisation programme based on the pillars of the transformation strategy.

With an obviously subdued economy for at least the short to medium term, it is wiser to expect government and the private sector to spend cautiously going forward. **We must ensure derivation of maximum value for money by maximising awareness & support for innovation and transformation across government.** With widespread awareness, implementation of transformation projects could be extremely effective because there would be improved will to invest on transformation projects, and more implementers (departments, parastatals) would be compelled to invest on transformative projects and initiatives. In this way by Botswana government taking the lead, more followers would start to carry the ‘burden’ of transforming the economy and accelerating Botswana towards a high-income status. This is the Silicon Valley model. One big giant takes a step as a leader into a promising but unknown path, the giant’s leaner companions follow suit and succeed, they succeed in large numbers and so fast that the giant does not have to lead the way anymore.



Conclusion

An increased number of successful transformation implementations translates into a much stronger transformation ecosystem and a much more multifaceted economy. Multiple dimensions in an economy simply mean a diverse economy, several big players participating meaningfully, use of many product & service delivery techniques, all leading to development of unique management and technology capabilities: these are fundamentals of game changing innovations, leading to economic sophistication. In this way, government makes the first step of adopting an innovative execution model, undertakes an innovative funding model, implements urgent programmes & projects, and subsequently influences all economic players to evolve their models and progressively execute transformative programmes & projects. All these come from a deliberate innovation decision: To move towards where we 'should be' and be bold enough to leapfrog to what we 'could be'.

Sophisticated companies across the world argue that they have evolved into technology companies. Their argument is backed by the way they budget for technology in their businesses. Tech projects and needs are increasingly budgeted for in the consumption budget: Operating Expenditure. After all, they feel the propensity to spend on technology as much as the need to spend on basic daily needs such as water and electricity. They have grown to be highly regarded as examples of innovation in industry. Imagine our government as an innovation leader in public administration and enabler of wealth creation. The cornerstone for achievement of these ideals is **innovative execution**, which is characterised by **execution partnerships**. The Covid 19 crisis provides the necessary tension and **urgency** to place innovation at the top of our national agenda for a country in desperate need for transformation. The Biggest Question is...**will we grab the opportunity??!**



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