

A culture of innovation to unlock potential

 By [Nkgadimeng Ramela](#)

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In the current global financial, environmental and socio-economic challenges. We often hear words such as, tightening the belt, following austerity measures and cost-cutting as some of the proposed solutions. Very few times do we hear of innovation being proposed as a solution to our current challenges.

Let us take the South African context as an example, with our current challenges and how we can approach them differently? Think of the recent water shortages caused by drought? Is saving water the only solution, to keeping our reservoirs at high levels? What about the decline in matric pass rate in various provinces? Are there better ways to improve learning, besides increasing the hours, which learners spend in classroom? Are there other means that government can collect its revenue, remain profitable; than to increase tariffs more often? To what extent can innovation trigger an improved, yet different way of looking at finding solutions to problems?



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Innovation is not limited to a few creative individuals, every one of us has it in them to be innovative; that is why innovation can be taught as a discipline. With the acknowledgement of all conventional experts and various professions, be either economists, financial experts, environmentalists, engineers and others we did not mention. Innovation can be the underlying principle that guides and underpins the solutions process to curb various global challenges.

It sounds cliché, to offer innovation as a solution. In a world that professes to be highly innovative. Even though there are very few results to prove. However, innovation has become almost the buzz word lately, more organisations have even included the word innovation in their business strategies. With that said, even the very companies that are aware of the need for innovation and creativity, remain traditional and non-transformed to innovate.

Since innovation is enabled by and depends upon the connection of strategy, process, structure, capability, and the human element. A critical enabler or significant barrier to an organisation's ability to innovate remains its culture. Many companies preach innovation, but, hardly have what it takes, nor an appetite for innovation. This is because many organisations have very little room for risk tolerance and flexibility to allow error. Of which, many creative and innovative solutions come up as a result of trial & error.

When Steve Jobs started Apple Computers, he didn't have a large research centre that could produce feasibility studies that guaranteed future success of Apple. And neither did Mark Zuckerberg have a large research and development (R&D) centre to start a social platform that could now be attributed to having changed the landscape of social media forever, being Facebook.

So organisations that look only to proven methodologies for business solutions, are as it were paralysed to innovate. This is because innovation does not rely heavily on R&D, nor does it always look to proven methodologies to forecast solutions.

Another challenge for business that prevents the implementation of innovation is because, more often than not, organisations see innovation as incrementally better version, or, a brand extension or a new fruit flavour for example, or processes that are built into the slow, organic growth line projections.

The innovation we are talking about here is as referred by Ken Perlman of Kotter International, "*Ground-breaking innovations, things that cannibalise existing markets, things that disrupt the old models, and services that challenge the embedded ways of thinking and working*".

However, very few companies are able to allow the so-called risk takers, of being able to try an innovation; due to rigid and strict rules that govern and make up company culture. This leading to more individuals shy-away, and losing confidence of sharing their new ideas, in fear of criticism or not been taken seriously.

In a conducive environment, where problem solving is not solely reliant on R&D, innovation will thrive, without barriers or limits. Allowing a collaborative approach to problem solving.

And before long, with proper guidance, solutions to problems will have been identified and hopefully implemented. Not because the solutions were found by a few individuals who are dubbed experts in certain areas, but from a collective effort under proper guidance. Building a culture of problem solving and to some extent boosting employee morale; because everyone will feel they have a bigger role to play and can contribute solutions beyond their job description to the business.

With such a culture that is open to ideas and risk tolerant, we can be confident that more business solutions will be found. Maybe not all problems will be resolved, however, a large part could be sorted.

ABOUT NKGADIMENG RAMELA

Nggadimeng holds a Diploma in Public Relations from Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), and an Advance Diploma in Brand Innovation from Vega School of Brand Leadership. Prior to him starting Nggadimeng Brand Communication, he has over eight years work experience in various sectors of business such as: NGO, Financial Institution, Department of Labour, Parastatal, Entertainment and FMCG, Media, including Education and Training.

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