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The race for innovation

Learning to innovate is essential for future success

Did you know that the cities with people who walk the fastest have also been found to innovate the fastest?

Singapore has indeed come out on top of a number of innovation measures. As the pace of life gets faster and faster, it becomes apparent that we need to innovate faster and faster, and Singapore has been leading this trend.

So just how innovative is Singapore? How did it get to the position it is in today and where could it be headed in the future?

STARTING FROM A DETERMINED VISION

Singapore stands out in the Asian region as a technologically advanced nation that has been able to leap ahead of its neighbours. Indeed it has managed to boost its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by an astonishing 3,700 per cent, 10 times that of the US, since it was founded as a nation state in 1965.

Racing from the back of the field to the front, Singapore can now claim a number of trophies, including being rated as one of the best cities for investment potential for 16 consecutive years. It is also said to be the world's easiest place to do business, as well as Asia's "most network-ready" and "most transparent" country.

At the beginning of the race the focus was on quality control, then it shifted gears to focus on customer service. Now the focus is on innovation.

INNOVATING INTO THE FUTURE

The question now needs to be asked: Are Singaporeans themselves innovative? Has this innovative focus from the government filtered through all levels? Has a culture that encourages sustainable innovation over the long term been established?

Singapore's next challenge will be to see if this sort of creativity moves beyond the visionary

leader to each individual, for example, through having freedom to ask questions, challenge ideas, look at the status quo and think more outside the box.

International research has shown that leadership styles that lean towards discipline and control rather than freedom have the advantage of enabling a leader to quickly cut through bureaucracy and cull poor or unproductive ideas, allowing for faster implementation.

But there has also been plenty of long-term research that has revealed that countries, cultures and organisations that have had strong creative visionary leadership with a focus on control have often stumbled when it comes to succession planning, and the loss of the inspirational leader can leave a large gap.

The list of companies that lost their way following the exit of a visionary founder is extensive. There have been studies done on



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those at the front of the pack that show they are at most risk.

Premium position captivity research shows that leaders can be hemmed in by a long history of success.

The Singapore solution started as a short-term sprint, using methods that helped the country get to the front of the pack, but it is in the process of transitioning to a more sustainable marathon.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Think about the parallels for organisations today and how these principles might be applied in business.

- How does the organisation transition from the visionary leader to an integrated and open innovation culture?
- How is it possible to transition to a foundation of freedom that will enable innovation and growth from the grassroots?
- What creative ecosystem can be built to support long-term sustainable innovation?

The more we contemplate these challenges and how they can be dealt with, the more we may be able to build a culture that supports sustainable innovation over the long term.

Article by Andrew Grant and Gaia Grant. This is an adapted excerpt from the Grant's new book *The Innovation Race: How To Change A Culture To Change The Game*.

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