

CCELD 2015 Group 1 Report: Toronto and Grenada

Creating Space for Innovation and Transformation

In order to facilitate innovation and transformation in their organizations, communities and societies, leaders must create the space – both physical and metaphorical. Within this context our group heard from leaders in all sectors of society in Toronto, Canada and throughout Grenada speak of their challenges and opportunities. Through these discussions, a number of sub-themes emerged:

Vision: the need to inspire and mobilize others around a clearly articulated vision of the future;

Physical Space: creating a physical environment that brings people together, encouraging collaboration, creativity, inclusion and well-being;

Encouraging Collaboration: building coalitions to work across organizations and industries, interest groups and segments of society to align efforts around common goals;

Embracing Risk: recognizing the value of failure as part of the innovation process, and intelligently managing risk to develop transformative solutions; and

Diversity: celebrating diversity of perspectives to enrich conversations and promote social inclusion.

Creating a Vision

True leadership requires the communication and implementation of a compelling vision for the future. Bringing something that does not yet exist into being. This includes creating the space for seeing things that others do not see, and the space for others to adopt and further the vision.

We heard the story of the West Indies cricket team, through the eyes of its former manager, Dr. Rudi Webster. Dr. Webster spoke about the need for self-belief and visualization so that teams and individuals can program their minds for success. In the context of the West Indies cricket team, this included the vision and belief that they could be the best team in the world. Given their unprecedented fifteen year undefeated record, they clearly brought this vision into reality.

Another example of vision involves the Grenada Cocoa Association's approach following the devastation of Hurricane Ivan in 2004. The Association is managing the cocoa industry in a manner that contributes to sustainable socio-economic growth for farmers, members of the community and Grenada in general. According to Mr. Flavian Antoine, a Director of the Association:

"After Ivan I went to look at the crops. There was nothing. That day I walked away from cocoa saying 'well at least land does not spoil'. It took me three years to get my head back into it. Like everything else it starts in the mind."

Mr Antoine, and perhaps others, by 2007 saw Ivan as "an opportunity to do things differently". A major study examining the industry in the aftermath of Ivan, stated that the Grenada cocoa industry was dead. The recommendations to shift resources away from cocoa to other property were dismissed. The leadership shared a vision where the product was again profitable.

At a time when external experts declared the industry dead, the leadership of the Association, strong in its belief in the viability of cocoa, sold some assets to have enough capital to offer immediate payment to farmers at the point of delivery of the product. Action was also taken to employ a value-chain approach that focused on improving the supply of cocoa directly to buyers. This eliminated the use of agents and reduced the cost of doing business. Members of the Association have also contributed to the production of local high grade chocolate and cocoa products. Consequently Grenadian chocolate is now sold to established companies like Wholefoods.

Creating Physical Space

Throughout our tour, there were many examples of how leaders can use physical space to facilitate innovation and transformation in their organizations and communities. Through investments in physical space and technology, we witnessed organizations that were making remarkable strides in a number of key areas:

Sense of community: the Dorsett Park Community Hub in Toronto provides a welcoming environment that celebrates the diversity of the community and offers a sense of belonging to newcomers. We heard from an emerging community leader who spoke about how the Hub has brought her and other women from the community together to help provide support and fellowship within their community.

Supporting well-being: Loblaws, a grocery retailer that is the largest private sector employer in Canada, has made investments in their headquarters (e.g. a gym, grocery delivery service, open green space, and collaborative work spaces) to support employee health and wellness, encourage creativity, loyalty and productivity.

Harnessing technology: Loblaws is also looking beyond industry norms to deliver Click and Collect, a customer-focused grocery pick up service that provides flexibility and saves time, while creating a digital space that goes beyond the limitations of physical space within its stores.

Encouraging Collaboration

Leaders Create the Space for Collaboration:

Innovation and transformative change rarely occurs on the back of an individual. By enabling effective collaboration, leaders can develop concepts and drive for results and outcomes that are greater than they themselves, or any individual, could achieve.

Additionally, collaboration enables leaders to effectively leverage and integrate diverse viewpoints, skills, and experiences to build solutions that are multi-dimensional, delivering benefit (or at least contemplating impact) across gender, ethnicity, physical ability, age, environment, etc.

Effective, diverse collaboration might happen spontaneously, but it is the leader's role to ensure that it does. Leaders must develop and maintain specific actions, skills, and awareness related to enabling collaboration. And it is not static. Leaders must continually evaluate the health and effectiveness of the collaboration and adjust as required.

Specifically, leaders must have the ability and agility to build bridges to, or remove obstacles between: organization and structure, trust and relationships, and aligning interests.

Organization and Structure

To bring complementary skills and differing perspectives together, collaborators need a framework for effective interaction. Who do you need? Where are they located? How will they share ideas effectively? Fundamentally, how will leaders ensure that the right ideas come together at the right time in the right way? Leaders must also establish clear roles and accountabilities that enable decision making and results.

One example of structure enabling collaboration and innovation involved the Loblaws eCommerce team. This team holds an annual 'Hackathon' giving employees a twenty-four hour window and resources to foster maximum creativity, with a focus on creating a useable product.

We also saw Air Canada physically organize their command centers in a way that puts all decision makers in the same room, organized in a way that enables natural escalation of issues from the front line to the command center lead. This has served to reduce the time it takes to make a critical decision, and ensures that decision makers have immediate access to the information they need.

Trust and Relationships

Leaders must build and tend to relationships so that people inspire one another, and share effectively. Sharing requires trust and a connection. Trust within a group is enabled when people make and keep commitments to one another. Without commitments you are just sharing ideas; innovation and transformative change requires that things get done.

Aligning Interests

Aligning interests is relatively simple in the private sector whereby performance and incentives can be structured around the achievement of a common goal. Aligning interests in the public space is substantially more complicated; essentially, it is why negotiators and arbitrators get paid the big bucks. In the public space, for leaders it is about drawing out what the interests are, seeking areas of mutual benefit, and establishing organization and structure that focuses the collaboration on those areas (terms of reference, etc.).

Teams must succeed and fail together, which links to the theme of embracing failure; the possibility of failure can be a wedge between teams if the consequences of failure are not shared. An example we observed was with Loblaw's who have a clear culture of succeeding and failing as a team, and in fact owning profit & loss for the entire eCommerce value chain. Not only did this mean that the measure of their success/failure would be clear, but it also removed internal organizational barriers to their success since the stores would not see them as a threat to their own success.

Leaders must also establish rewards along the way to sustain team energy. Basic human nature leads us to be cautious with where we put our energy. Without reward, in time people will put their energy elsewhere. Rewards can be emotional, physical, financial, and so forth; however leaders must ensure that their team is getting something back for their effort.

Embracing Risk

Intelligent risk-taking and embracing failure are necessary conditions for innovation to flourish. We saw many examples of leaders and organizations that put this philosophy into practice.

John Tory, Mayor of Toronto, understands the importance of taking risk and embracing failure from his experience running Rogers telecom in the private sector. He's trying to bring that approach to the civil service by giving his people space to fail by accepting accountability at the top, though he recognizes that public and media scrutiny discourages leads to a risk adverse culture in the public sector

Trial and error is built into the Loblaw DNA. If you are not failing, you are not innovating enough. From the in-store chef to the eCommerce Team hackathons and product development processes, significant dollars are invested in developing new ideas from staff and customers, and trialing those ideas in the market. They are quick to seek market feedback to stop the failures early and build on successes when they occur.

Grenada demonstrates resilience. Hard hit in last decade by crises like Hurricane Ivan and the global economic meltdown left the country in what many would have assumed as 'hopeless'. With national self-belief, the country has embraced failure and set about to rebuild through social partnerships, new government, home-grown structural adjustment and innovative approaches to attracting foreign direct investment. With five percent growth, employment gains, and reduced fiscal debt they are well on their way to recovery.

Celebrating Diversity

In order to optimize innovation within their organizations and communities, leaders must create the space for a diversity of perspectives. The need for inclusiveness and engagement of persons regardless of race, sexual orientation, social and economic exclusion is critical.

The Dorsett Park Community Hub in Toronto (United Way) provides an accessible community space that brings together community health and social services for traditionally under-served segments of the community. It is important for society to create an engaging space and inclusive programming to ensure that people from all walks of life are economically and culturally integrated into society. Further, this community hub demonstrated that when organizations go to the people, where the need is, it helps to empower community members to invest in their own future.

A final lesson on diversity of perspectives came from the Government of Grenada. Many Ministers and Senators within the government came from the private sector, bringing fresh perspectives on public policy issues. We also met with a Senator who had come from a diverse Caribbean background and an economically disadvantaged background, who brings a different perspective to issues such as youth development and citizen engagement. These perspectives bring a fresh lens to the challenges facing the Grenadian government and society.

Conclusion

Leaders across regions and sectors share many of the same challenges and opportunities. Through our many conversations in Toronto and Grenada, we learned how leaders are creating the space within their organizations to facilitate innovation and transformation to create the future, now.