



Table of Contents

License	3
Introduction	4
Pwani Innovation Week - Creating an Innovation Strategy	4
Understanding the Innovation Cycle	4
Idea generation and mobilisation	5
Forging forward	5
Advocacy and Screening	6
Forging forward	6
Experimentation	7
Forging forward	7
Commercialisation	7
Forging forward	8
Diffusion and Implementation	8
Forging forward	9
Conclusion	9

License



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons [Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) License.

Introduction

Creating a culture of innovation in a limited space such as a company has long been documented. It is doable and especially because working with a homogenous group, the vision of the group and its objectives are aligned and there is a shared common purpose driven by the company or organisation itself. However, deciphering how to scale this culture into a more diverse group is less straightforward. It involves much painstaking work that has increasingly proven itself dire in the context of governments that seek to inculcate the culture among its populace.

However, we can no longer prevaricate the need for conversation on building strong innovation cultures among a diverse set of people regionally. The need to innovate for developing countries demands strategic and deliberate changes in government. It is becoming increasingly clear that technological advancement has the ability to catapult developing countries to take the much needed economic leap. The [World Bank has berated developing countries' inability to adopt technologies](#). In doing so, it identified the fact the private sector in developing countries is tethered from exploring diverse technological options for growth as a result of the dearth in human capital and the rigidity of government structures that disfavour the development of an innovation ecosystem.

Pwani Innovation Week - Creating an Innovation Strategy

[Pwani Innovation Week 2018](#) was well designed to begin the conversation on engineering a regional strategy leading to policy for innovation in the Coastal region. It is important to note that the Coastal region here denotes the six counties at the Coast: Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Lamu, Tana River, and Taita Taveta. In doing so, it served as a meeting point for innovators, the community, the different representatives of national and county governments, the private sector and capital providers.

The most important conversation in the room, indeed the only conversation in the room, concerned the deliberate creation of vital partnerships that will churn and sustain innovation in the region. The conversation turned on understanding the innovation cycle following which, each individual in the room could adequately appreciate their role within the explicated cycle and identify where they could plug themselves in for maximum impact.

Understanding the Innovation Cycle

What emerged from the various speeches and panel sessions throughout the week was that there is an identifiable innovation cycle on which the conversation on an innovation strategy should occur. The cycle could be understood as a culmination of five steps which are the following:-

1. Idea generation and mobilisation
2. Advocacy and Screening
3. Experimentation
4. Commercialisation

5. Diffusion and implementation

Idea generation and mobilisation

This involves a deliberate process to encourage the generation of ideas for the purpose of achieving a set goal. Pwani Innovation Week speakers and audience were unequivocal in their demand for a process that is region-focused. Despite the understanding that the process is spontaneous, there was a call for ideas that solve problems uniquely experienced by the Coastal region.

In order for innovators and entrepreneurs to design autochthonous solutions, we observed that there was need to involve the community in the creation process. Understanding innovation as a serendipitous event makes it seclusionary - left to the exclusive domain of innovators rather than a collaborative venture which involves the end-users of the product at its creation, in order for them to facilitate uptake of the innovative solution into the market.

The community does not exclude the government. Devolution has enabled a more people-centred attitude towards governance. County governance and constitutionally mandated public participation makes the government an indelible part of any innovation strategy and policy formulation process. It is capable, as a vital source of data, to tell what innovative solutions to seek and, as a potential capital provider, to invest in the solutions whose uptake it seeks to catapult.

Vital working partnerships forged between government; academic institutions such as universities or vocational schools which serve as breeding grounds for innovators; the community; and the private sector will catalyse the idea generation and mobilisation process. The technology hubs and innovation spaces will then serve as transitional chapters bridging the gap between generated ideas and the actualisation and marketability and utility of these ideas.

Forging forward

The County governments of Mombasa and Taita Taveta pledged their support for a uniquely designed innovation strategy for the Coastal region.

- The County government of Mombasa signed a Memorandum of Understanding with CISCO for the purpose of providing training opportunities to the youth.
- The County government of Mombasa requested Swahilipot Hub to develop a portal from which the community of innovators and the greater community could direct the county government to the different sectors which needed investment from the government.
- The same portal would also direct the county government on the various needed legislation or amendment of legislations to facilitate innovative solutions in the region.
- The portal would also drive policy initiatives within the county government for the purpose of facilitating innovation in the region.
- The County government of Taita Taveta pledged the same support to innovators in the region.

Advocacy and Screening

The second step involves evaluation of an idea's pros and cons. The two processes usually run simultaneously to prevent investors from rejecting an idea purely on the basis of its novelty. This intermediate process involves a diverse range of stakeholders. It was agreed that the community as a whole remains relevant at this stage. However, the importance of innovation spaces comes to fore.

Scrutiny drives this process and the eye of an experienced professional is important at this stage. Providing spaces where budding innovators and seasoned entrepreneurs can exchange critical feedback is crucial to facilitate seamless screening of ideas. Advocacy on the other hand could be expertly driven by these spaces because they are not likely to suffer resource scarcity as individual innovators would. The importance of both advocacy and screening would be to test the utility of the ideas both technically and practically.

A crucial partnership at this stage would be with the providers of risk capital. It is a known fact that most innovations do not take off, especially in developing countries, due to the lack of risk capital. The process itself is usually long, drawn out, and exclusionary. The infusion of capital into a startup to transform it from a risk-laden venture to one that most financial institutions would lend to is a tedious process that is understandably not within reach for many starting entrepreneurs and innovators. Innovation spaces provide linkages between the providers of risk capital and innovators and the result, is that risk capital providers become crucial evaluators during the screening process. They are able to critically advise innovators on the suitability and sustainability of their models and as they sieve out the unsustainable models, they are also able to facilitate the development of the truly capable innovative solutions.

Forging forward

- There was consensus to grow Swahilipot Hub for this purpose. The audience and the panelists were keen to see the same innovation hub model replicated throughout the Coastal region to facilitate the intake of young innovators at the university and colleges level.
- Moreover, there was consensus on the need to include innovators working outside the fringes of formal institutions through their inclusion in innovation hubs and other such spaces. The idea, would not be to centralise innovation, but rather to facilitate it.
- Already forged partnerships with risk capital providers such as the county governments, Mastercard Foundation - Fund for Rural Prosperity, 1000 Alternatives, Liquid Telecom, Cellulant and others, will help not only provide the capital needed to help the innovations take off, but also help through the screening and advocacy process.

Experimentation

The third step involves an actual test of an idea's sustainability. It may involve taking the idea to market at a few select locations to test out the utility of the product. As mentioned previously, Pwani Innovation Week attendees were keen on ensuring that the proposed innovation yields results for the Coastal region by helping to solve problems in the area.

The process as discussed, involves a vibrant community of innovators and their vital stakeholders. Part of these stakeholders is the community as a whole which is involved right from idea generation and mobilisation. This step would hence involve taking the product out to the community that requested it for feedback.

The innovation spaces in the region, working together with the risk capital providers would provide convergence areas for the innovators to collect information on the uptake of their innovations. They would be able to directly collect feedback on user experience and general utility including pricing of the product in question.

The process would help elucidate to the stakeholders involved, the durability of the product- both financially and utilitywise. They could either decide to keep the product and prepare it for shipping, cancel the product as a result of its shortcomings in the market or delay shipping of the product to enable research and modifications in order for it to suit the market.

Forging forward

- Vibrant partnerships with risk capital providers will be forged to facilitate the experimentation process.
- The proposed platform linking the community with innovators and government will provide a collaboration space between the three groups during the experimentation phase.

Commercialisation

This is perhaps a difficult process as innovators do not naturally tend to commercialisation of their ventures. However, the process as elucidated above will inform commercialisation of the innovation in question. The involvement of the stakeholders in question help the innovator create with the price-value of the innovation in mind. Furthermore, the innovator is well aware of the value that product will retail at when taken to market.

This is easier done through the various partnerships explained above because the innovator is at this point sure of the utility of the product. Furthermore, the reason it has gotten to this stage at the cycle, is because of consensus from most stakeholders of the product's durability in the market and its

sustainability. The commercialisation stage is an intermediate stage that allows the players to move on to the next state that combines advocacy of the product, and its diffusion and implementation.

A crucial partnership at this stage is with government and particularly, the national government on issues of protection of intellectual property. Representatives from the government discussed the virtue of having innovators keenly examine the laws on intellectual property in the country. The reason for this, they contended, was to ensure that the law provides the appropriate environment encouraging innovation rather than serving as a tether. The result would be that innovators are able to sustain themselves from their innovations without fear of the usurpation of their creations.

Forging forward

- Consolidated partnerships above will help provide a sound basis for commercialisation of the product to provide returns to the partner.
- Partnerships to allow for lobbying on changes to the intellectual property regime in the Country will be facilitated through the hubs in the region such as Swahilipot Hub.

Diffusion and Implementation

The diffusion and implementation stage involve getting acceptance and use of the product created. The process, as conceptualised by most of the speakers during the conference, would involve the shipping of the products created out to market through the help of government, the innovation spaces, the risk capital providers and the innovators themselves.

The process introduces the innovator to a wider market than the one used during the experimentation stage and still demands from the innovator their endless input to improve the product through its constant monitoring and evaluation.

In this regard, the innovation cycle at the Coastal region will be continuous. Feedback collected from the community and end users of the product will be used to provide for modifications of the product making it more durable and sustainable and the innovators, more responsive.

Furthermore, the innovation spaces will be able to ascertain the impact of their input through the uptake of the product by the market and the product's reported utility. They will also provide convergence zones for the collection of data by the innovators from the end-users, and serve as drivers of monitoring and evaluation of the use of the product. New information gathered at this stage will feed the idea generation and mobilisation stage on the various needs of the community, structuring better solutions for the problems experienced in the region. Consequently, the result is a valid cycle, which feeds into itself to provide for data improving existing innovations and informing the creation of new, much needed solutions.

Forging forward

- Consolidated partnerships above will help provide a sound basis for the process of diffusion and implementation.

Conclusion

The process as conceptualised during the Pwani Innovation Week coherently identifies the innovation process as agreed upon by the stakeholders in attendance. It also properly conceptualises the different roles to be undertaken by the different stakeholders. The entirety of the discussions will be more thoroughly explored in a report to follow. However, the purpose of this Think Piece is to encourage policy formulation that will guide the development of region wide innovative culture, grounded in the innovation cycle and roles that the players at the region will undertake.