Trying is the new talking

Singapore is an ideal place to prototype ideas as it has all the ingredients to create a perfect learning-by-doing environment.

The execution of any project is a continuous cycle of trying and learning. If our focus is solely on the outcomes we want to achieve, we may lose sight of the process of trying and learning along the way. This can lead to a mindset where we are afraid to try new things, or we may not try hard enough to find solutions.

There are two main reasons why trying is important. First, it allows us to learn from our mistakes and successes. Second, it allows us to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances.

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I have always loved Southwest Airlines' iconic CEO Herb Kelleher's famous quote: "Yes, we have a strategic plan. It's called doing things." This speaks to me as a designer - design is fundamentally an act of making and creating tangible things - and it speaks to me as a consultant who is growing increasingly frustrated at what I can only describe as the mass overthink that seems to perpetuate modern business today.

Recently, I ran an errand for 400 senior executives who worked for a large US corporation. Two of their key internal complaints were that they were never fast enough to go to market with new ideas, and that they spent an inordinate amount of time proving to each other that whatever they were trying to do - be it launch a product, a service or a piece of marketing, was "valid." I asked them to write down on a Post-it note how many years they had been working since they left college. The result was staggering; sitting in that room was over 5,300 years of experience. What was also staggering was that never recognized or acknowledged what an amazing business asset that incredible collective knowhow was.

One very senior executive stood up and said: "We need to do two things. We need to start to trust each other and our intuition and we need to learn to get things out in the world more quickly because of it. We can beat the competition by trying harder at trying."

There are two axes to this point, clearly the value of trusting your gut is one, but the other is the notion of getting something out there in the world and learning by doing. The new business world is being fed with intuition and agility, and ideas that are successful rely on new creation and feedback cycles that make it easier to launch, then learn. It is time for a new approach. To be clear, I am not prescribing rashness, but I am suggesting boldness.

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To us and our clients, measuring the journey is as important as measuring the Destination, since I would love to see Singapore adopt building on top of existing experiments in districts such as Punggol’s Eco-Town and Jurong Lake is a good way to begin. They are already setting themselves up as perfect test beds to prototype new ideas and methodologies to both create solutions and garner feedback.

So a final thought if Singapore’s goal is to move from an efficiency-driven economy to an innovation-driven economy, perhaps it is time to start that versus well, talking about it. Here’s to trying harder at trying.