**INL2:2 Creative process in action**

**Designing a creative exercise**

*Naida Demirovic, Ermal Bizhuta, Agustin Velasco, Jayadeep Ravuri*

*School of Innovation, Design, and Engineering*

*2017-12- 16*

****

1. *What tool or exercise have you developed? Describe it.*

The case we chose to write about is Vodafone Albania, a part of Vodafone Group Plc, which is considered a global communication leader. Our contact, in this case, was the Director of Marketing, Erik Zagani, which one of the group's member happened to have had several connections in the past. Vodafone Albania claims to be one of the leading companies in the Albanian market providing a significant contribution to the Albanian economy and innovation field. The company has recruited the best employees and the best expertise in the country and has professionally trained its employees, being the employer of choice in the country.

The exercise we chose to write about and find *a suitable solution* to be developed for, is Vodafone’s issues with the innovation process in Albania. Vodafone has had many successful and innovative ideas and processes in the whole Europe, but when it comes to the Balkan region, especially Albania, things tend to change mainly because of the region's different economic and social features. The company’s innovation ideas were not “good” enough for Albanian market. The phrase is half ironical, since the ideas tended to be pretty good but a little too advanced for the region’s actual level of development at that moment. We suppose that the problem was that Albania, being a developing country, its citizens were still not ready to fit with the world’s technological advancement. Also, a thing that got added to this was the mentality of the population at the time. They were more willing to stick on the old communication technologies that they already had, instead of throwing themselves into an unknown ‘abyss’ of new and shiny devices with speed compared to the light. They didn’t actually believe in Vodafone’s advertisements because everything seemed ‘too good’ to be true. Instead of trying Vodafone’s new products/packages they decided to keep using old telecommunication companies. They thought that Vodafone’s advancement was not that much coherent with the population’s wealth and that the company would not last as long. That was a big problem for Vodafone because they had already invested a lot of effort and money to succeed in that area. They made big projects and started some kind of national movement to ‘high-tech’ the population.

This movement is a part of what Vodafone thought as a solution to the company's problem, and at the same time can be our solution to the need our tool is designed to handle. The results were slow but at the same time still functional enough to change people's mind.

We found this exercise interesting for this course, but also for companies (not just telecommunication ones) that have departments in many countries. Developing this tool, we are also developing our way of dealing with different problems in different cultures and countries of the world.

*2) What kind of group needs does your tool or exercise aim to facilitate? Describe the need and how your tool or exercise is supposed to address this need.*

Our tool aims to facilitate mostly companies and organizations which are distributed in many countries. These companies often happen to be international ones, with branches in the whole world. Vodafone, our case company happens to be a company which is extended in many countries, especially European ones, from the most advanced to the least developed country in the region.

The process of adjusting to the local needs of the country the company is basing its innovation process it is most of the time affected by many factors with one being the social factor, the one our problem discusses. Various social factors that are part of the organization’s market, task, and situation context influence the cognitive, social, and motivational processes that are critical for the company’s innovative process. Creative outputs can in turn modify some of the organization’s aim, task, and situational variables. **(Paulus & Dzindolet, 2008)**

* We have found that the problems of the company have mostly derived from the idea management group of the company, lacking in innovative ideas management techniques and hierarchial structuring of the team’s dynamic aspect. We found the team to be very plain and not having good and open communication within it. As we know, this is a fundamental problem, as skillful team communication creates awareness and understanding that promotes proficiency as team members complete their tasks. The elements of good team communication help a company to achieve and sustain profitability **(Backström, 2017)**.

PESTL analysis can also provide a good framework to illustrate the challenges a business faces once it goes international **(Frue 2010).** Our exercise aims to facilitate the innovation management group of organizations that have trouble with adapting to different country economic and cultural backgrounds, facing problems in many fields. Below factors have a significant impact on businesses:

**Political (P): -** Political situation in the country you plan to take your business to is highly critical. Government policies, Labour laws, corruption etc. Expropriation is one of the major concerns before the foreign company commits to the investment. The regulatory pressures within the home market in Albania are also a big factor. Multinational companies based in the Albania are subject to greater scrutiny of the business processes. So the company must always monitor political stability within the country as well.

**Economical (E): -** Albania is a predominantly mountainous country, with about 20% of the country's territory consisting of coastal plains, while the remaining by a mass of high rugged mountain ranges. Customers who don’t live in big cities were affected a lot by this, since there were more people outside the capital, Tirana, than inside it. Changes in the economic scenario tax rates, interest/ exchange rate, inflation can create major dilemma for the business: whether to cut the cost and conserve resources or invest in new product to exploit competitor’s weakness.

**Social (S): -** These factors deal more with the consumer aspect of a business. Demographics of the country, lifestyle of the people and their mentality, ethnic/religious views are very important from the perspective of launching a product. Inability to identify a cultural fit between the target country and your product, marketing campaign can lead to withdrawal of the product/services from the market. In our case we deal with Vodafone’s inability to fully relate to Albania’s social market and idealizations. **(Bozic Yams 2016)**

**Technological (T): -** Manufacturing maturity, capability, capacity should be considered depending on the type product you want to launch. The problem here could be that the existing infrastructure and technology in the target country (Albania) is not yet ready for your product or business plan. If not identified at the initial stage significant investments could be needed to create a technological landscape for the launch of your product/services. **(Boeninger 2013)**

**Legal (L): -** Understanding of the regulatory bodies and processes is one of the most important problems that a business can have while venturing into other countries. Consumer protection legislation, environmental legislation, health & safety and employment law, etc. keep on developing the inability to keep up with the same can create problems for the business. Ex: - Late alteration to the product or processes involves significant cost impacts, which in markets with a not-so-big profit, can be very damaging to the company.

***Our exercise aims to facilitate*** companies that struggle in adapting their product to meet the needs of an overseas country’s market, seeing that is a considerable undertaking and difficult and will likely require a substantial investment of time, money and change of strategy.

E.g. A company that is promoting their products through YouTube advertisements in a region like Africa they would need to think and reorganise theirselves before doing it, mostly because of the fact that most people in Africa do not have access to the Internet at all. In that case, they could really use our tool, which would also mean for them that they would need to come up with a new ideation of their stategies for that area. They would need a whole skilled team for that innovation process and be ready to take a risk, carefully plan the whole project and first examine their market area.

In Vodafone’s case, they lost a lot of money because they believed in previous experiences. **(Zagani 2017).** They invested a lot in different kind of advertisements. When they figured out that it was not successful they invested a lot in a new team for innovation process and when they came up with new ideas it was also very costly. What you can learn from their case is that you need a detailed plan for every single department, skilled technical experts and local market economical experts in the idea management group of the company. In our tool on the 14th December, we gave a description of this problem to the other groups and asked them to come up with ideas for solving it.

The description of the problem: "You are opening a company in a new country. Your innovative ideas and processes were successful in all other countries. In this country, there is not much interest in your product. You need to come up with a new idea. How can we figure out what is the best solution to solve your problem? How to show citizens that you will give them what they want? How to convince them that you are the only one that has right the product for them?"

*3) How could your exercise or tool be used in a company/organization for innovation and problem-solving processes?*

To maintain a competitive position, companies today need to constantly explore new business opportunities, explore spaces for innovation. To this end, companies will need to use tools in the different phases of innovation. *For example, in our case study*, Vodafone to try to solve the problems that have arisen in Albanian should conduct a study on the sensitivity of opportunity that can begin with a particular business objective. The company should try to identify an innovative development opportunity based on a critical mass of information. To this end, it should study changes, conditions and form a strategic proposal. It is very important to know the client and their unsatisfied needs, observing the people in their environment allows us to identify unsatisfied needs and make them explicit. It is not only necessary to know how potential customers can be, but also to know the society and its background, this involves capturing information from the industry, competitors, organizational structures, networks, markets, business models, technologies, processes, products, services, brands and distribution channels. Afterwards, Vodafone must have the ability to properly organize information to analyze it on customers and the social environment, which will lead to the identification of innovative business opportunities. Exploration should be based on a set of criteria generated from the stated needs and other concepts resulting from research and analysis of the previous stages. There are four key activities that the innovator must follow in a disciplined manner at this stage, committing him/herself to exploring the concept, organization, evaluation, and systematization of the process. **(Fernández, 2008)**

Once Vodafone will perform a search and analysis of information about the market structure, competition, society and customers, it must create an action plan. These projects must be supported by clear processes, contexts that allow the identification of the innovative impact on the environment and must be considered as a strategic advantage. can be strategic plans covering innovations ranging from products, communications, services, systems, organizational processes, environment, and brands. The success of the concepts depends to a large extent on the adoption given by the users and the context in which they are used, so once the action plan is decided, an effective way to ensure success is to test concepts in real-life situations as it is of great value to test prototypes in contact with users or potential customers. With this, problems can be identified in time and corrected. Finally, there is only the market implementation. At this stage, management teams use a variety of tools to provide continuity for successful innovative development.

To bring this whole process to a successful conclusion, discipline and follow-up in implementation are of paramount importance to achieve the best results in the application of the tool. This process provides a holistic vision for the development of multidisciplinary teamwork and allows the integration of diverse concepts.

**Feedback we got from our creative exercise**

As a part of presenting the exercise/innovation tool, we as a group put forward a question to the participants. After that, it took about 10 minutes for us to explain our problem and the task to the participants. We actually, came to know how different individuals think in a different way regarding our problem; how the participants' process of creative thinking took place in obtaining the solution. We also came to know whether the participant's idea flow was static or flowing, idealogically speaking, in the process of creative thinking. The first static part was at the beginning, because the participants were still thinking about the tool from the previous group. We realized that we should have given them one minute to take a break from the last group topic and reflect on ours. The second part, when their ideas stopped flowing was after 4-5 minutes of problem explanation, so we showed them the advertisement that could motivate them to think more creatively. We also realized how important is for the facilitator’s role to be present during the “facilitation process” to the participants. We were visiting groups to check if they had some questions and if they were on the track with their ideas. They were very satisfied with it. Another thing we achieved, was to know how a digital visual aid, like a video, kept the group in going on with their process of creative thinking. It was a funny video and we saw that after watching the video when the participants directly started to write their new solutions and ideas. It also made us think, as facilitators, on how to develop our innovative exercise, to make the participants come up with more ideas and perspectives, during the process of facilitation. As mentioned above, there was a static flow at the beginning because the participants were still thinking about the tool from the previous group. One group played the music and told us to take one minute to relax and think about something nice. It was a very pleasant moment for our group. We came to know that survey, benchmarking of the company, demonstration strategies, iterative interactional process between citizens and company are the few best possible solutions for our problem.

*To sum it up;*

* We came to know how individuals think differently.
* How the participants process of creative thinking took place in obtaining the solution .
* We also came to know where the participant’s idea flow was static or stopped flowing, in the process of creative thinking.
* How important the facilitator’s role should be present during the process of facilitating it to the participants.
* We came to know how a digital visual aid, like a video, kept the group going on in their process of creative thinking.
* It also made us think, as facilitators, on how to develop our innovative exercise, to make the participants come up with more ideas and perspectives, during the process of facilitation.
* We came to know that survey, benchmarking of the company, demonstration strategies, iterative interactional process between citizens and company ,are few best possible solutions for our problem.

**Peer to peer feedback**

After 10 minutes the other groups gave us their solutions to our problem regarding the innovation process in a specific country or region. Their tips and solutions involved resolving our problem through funny advertisements that would show citizens that the company’s service will give them exactly what they need. They also suggested that the company should do a research in a form of a survey so that they can improve things that are needed in that country/region. One of the suggestions was having workshops where the company will have face to face communication with citizens. In that way, citizens would try their products and have their own opinion about it. Vodafone could explain more about its mission through presentations and convince citizens that they are working on the solutions to the requirements they gave to the company.

* The main suggestion to us was to deduce the text of the problem, given to the participants and correct formulation of our question is required.
* Another major aspect of our innovative exercise, which is missing, was a creative warmup exercise or task, before facilitating the problem to the participants. Creative warmups seem to make the atmosphere of work very calm and flexible for everybody to feel comfortable within the working space. **(Isaksen & Tidd 2006)**
* In one of our question, a participant had a doubt whether “the product was not interesting, or the citizens did not show any interest on that particular product?”.
* Some of the participants wanted more background information about the problem, so that they could come up with more ideas.
* Most of the participants appreciated us about our interesting idea presented to them.
* Participants were convinced by the way, the facilitators have addressed the groups and tried to make interaction in between, and the way the suggestions were given to come up with ideas.
* Some of the participants were also happy about the introduction to the task.
* The easy task as a leading group was to check on the participants during their process of doing the task given to them.

**Our solution**

When participants finished with their proposed solutions we told them about one solution example that our group had thought of, based on one telecommunication company from India. They had the similar problem with our case company’s one, so what they did to attract customers, was giving them free SIM cards with free calls and messages for one year. After that period, they would eventually remain customers of the company and slowly adapt to the company’s prices. Since most of the people love free products, we saw that was a good solution for that kind of problem. It is indeed risky because the company loses a lot of profit, by sustaining the service and product and by not taking money from it, but they believed in their idea since they knew that people would see the company’s good service quality and welcome their products in a period of one year. In the end, it was very successful for them.

**REFERENCES**

Bozic Yams, N**.** (2016): *Choreographing creative processes for innovation,*  Routledge

Chad Boeninger, (2013), *PEST Analysis Information for a company, organization, or industry*

Isaksen & Tidd (2006), *Meeting the innovation challenge*, chapter 8.

Paulus, P. B.; Dzindolet, M. (2008): *Social influence, creativity and innovation. Social influence*, vol. 3, No. 4

Weltfish G., Stechert E. (1937 ) & CO, *Publications of the American Ethnological Society*, VOL XVII, New York

Figure 1: Kiesha Frue (2010) *PESTLE Analysis*, Volume II, Pg. 11-14

Figure 2: Juan Carlos Fernández (2008), *Tools for innovation* , University of Catalonia, Spain

Figure 3: Erik Zagani (March 2017) – *How Vodafone innovates*, Economic Journal Tirana

Figure 4: Backström, T: Professor of innovation science, Mälardalens Univesity. *Lecture 11 December 2017*