

FROM THE EDITOR

From smart drones to smart leadership: lessons in innovation

The evolution of the word 'innovation' is an interesting one. It has gone from a description of any number of unique selling propositions for dishwashers and door locks to the whole change in mindset necessary for business (and life) in the 21st century. A relatively long semantic journey has seen it transform from the patois of hawkers on late night television to the parlance of heads of state. In the pages that follow, the prevalence and importance of innovation cannot be denied.

Our own Singapore is in the process of travelling from an efficiency-driven 'little red dot' to an innovation-driven smart city-state. In this issue we explore how innovation is impacting our lives in ways that go beyond flat screens, driverless cars and new apps on smart phones. As one of our contributors notes, technology alone does not make a city or community smart; it needs smart governance, smart businesses and smart citizens.

American companies like Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook are a top-of-mind presence for many people when it comes to the subject of innovation. But as our authors point out, the local Internet players in the Chinese digital market have had to innovate and improve well beyond the cloning of western originals.

Innovation is also making its presence felt on our borderless markets, and as geographical borders become more porous, the threat of 'grey markets' continues to grow with firms having very different philosophies when dealing with these markets. One thing we can be sure of is, as borders become porous and contiguous markets are effected by new business solutions, adaptations, mutations and innovation are inevitable.

You will also see how a pan-Asian mobile remittance platform could just be the next big disruption in global remittances. Global bankers are finding themselves on the edge of disruption as they nervously anticipate the waves of FinTech and serious innovation lapping at their vaults.

Few industries are immune to the pressures of innovation and change as some of the stodgiest, low investment and most traditional industries are being transformed. The lack of IT-based systems in India has impacted her 'kirana' stores, or traditional retailers. But the problem is not insurmountable, say the authors of a study that proposes social supply chain innovation to connect the unconnected 'kirana'.

In this edition, you will likewise discover how Unilever noticed the importance of the mom-and-pop store to the fabric of Thai society. Applying its insights and experience in merchandising, the company developed the 'Platinum Store' concept as an innovative step to empowering small retailers for the community, by the community.

For most people, digital innovation and its association with Big Data, closely followed by the drying up of long-term career prospects due to changes in the hiring landscape, is one that sets off the alarm bells. Digital genomics (read: use of Big Data) is one of the frontier technologies in machine intelligence that is being applied to improving business performance, and is now proving to be a central basis of competition. And yes, steady careers and linear or vertical patterns towards upward mobility in organisations are gone—but as one of our authors point out, 'barbell' strategies serve as a means of addressing the issues arising from increasing marketplace disruption.

Despite, or in spite of, being digitally intelligent in an age of innovation, one cannot detract from the *sine qua non* of effective leadership. Our authors explore the issue of innovation governance—a holistic approach to steering, promoting and sustaining innovation.

And finally, in our interview with Nobel Peace Laureate and former President of Timor-Leste, Dr. José Ramos-Horta, the concept of ethical leadership was brought to the fore. Humility and compassion are the two greatest qualities of a leader, he says. Leaders must make a conscious effort to be accessible, and should never forget that countries are not statistics: "Countries are people with feelings." In other words, leaders can be competent technocrats and deliver results, and yet just as easily fall from grace if they are perceived to be lacking in humility. A timely reminder.



DR PHILIP C ZERRILLO
Editor-in-Chief
Asian Management Insights
pzerrillo@smu.edu.sg

Hyflux®



WATER SOLUTIONS THAT IMPACT LIVES

Hyflux is dedicated to delivering solutions for a sustainable and secure water future.

With a fully-integrated platform and proven membrane technologies in water and process streams, Hyflux is the partner of choice for cost-effective and environmentally responsible solutions in seawater desalination, water recycling, wastewater treatment and potable water treatment.

Over the years, Hyflux has amassed in-depth experience in designing, developing, testing and commissioning, operating and maintaining industrial and municipal water treatment plants of various sizes and functions.

Through its projects across the world, Hyflux has left an indelible imprint on the communities that it serves, driven by its commitment to produce water that is clean, safe and affordable.

Hyflux Ltd

Hyflux Innovation Centre, 80 Bendemeer Road, Singapore 339949
enquiries@hyflux.com | www.hyflux.com