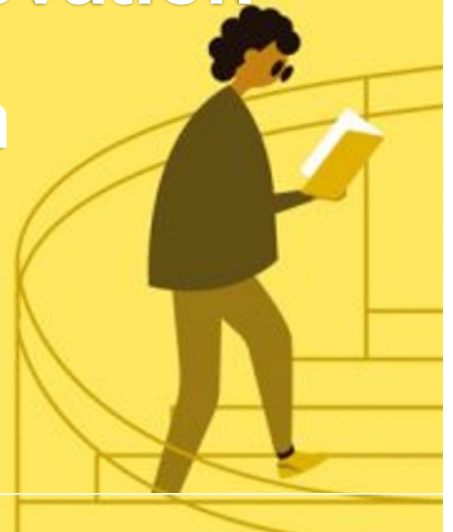


# How structured innovation drives growth

GROWTH

LIAM BRENNAN, GLOBAL DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION PROGRAMMES, MEDIACOM, AND GULREZ 'GARY' ARORA, GLOBAL LEAD, LAUNCHPAD, MARS 29 APR 2019

Structured innovation programmes give you the freedom to experiment and find new growth. Mars' Gulrez 'Gary' Arora, Global Lead, Launchpad at Mars speaks to MediaCom's Global Director of Innovation Liam Brennan.

Although innovation is a powerful force for business success, large companies can sometimes be too slow to adapt. Corporate red tape, endless rounds of approvals and a general fear of failure can contribute to a bureaucratic culture that holds onto ideas and solutions that no longer serve the enterprise and its needs.

That means they miss out on the growth that comes with being first to market with a new

media channel, a new way of selling their products and services or new product development.

This is particularly challenging in the marketing space, where consumer shopping behaviour and media consumption has changed rapidly due to technological forces (mobile tech, on-demand media, the growth of e-commerce).

In recent years, younger brands, such as Uber, Airbnb, Dollar Shave Club and Netflix, have all used new technology to disrupt and displace large, traditional corporates that have been slow to change.

New brands are also emerging – in every vertical from haircare to mattresses and drinks to snacks – built with new technology at their core and a digital-first mindset. Being digitally native and data-centric, they are able to compete with traditional market leaders by better understanding the consumer and their path to purchase, reducing friction in the buying process and move at a pace that traditional brands simply cannot match.

### **Streamlining for success**

For large companies to navigate this new world successfully and maintain growth, it's essential to streamline work practices and make innovation a daily part of their lives. Structured innovation programmes give them a way of doing that.

Since the summer of 2017, Mars has been running 'Launchpad', a programme which helps it collaborate with technology startups and work in new, agile ways.

The goal is to help Mars brands harness and leverage new technology to stay relevant and reach, engage and convert consumers in a fast-changing, digitally influenced world. It works by asking Mars associates to submit a business challenge or identify an opportunity for business growth leveraging data and technology.

Briefs are selected by senior stakeholders at the company such as the Chief Marketing and

Chief Customer Officers and then the Launchpad team identify suitable startups to work with, before executing a live pilot.

“We review each pilot, scale those that have been successful, and learn from those that weren’t,” says Gulrez ‘Gary’ Arora, Global lead on the Mars Launchpad programme.

“Currently, we have 30 pilots underway anchored to our priorities around reaching the right consumer at the right time with the right message, immersive and interactive content (voice, chatbots, augmented reality, gaming, etc.) and new ways to drive seamless conversion across multiple channels/platforms.”

### Proving structured innovation works

Launchpad has already produced several successful pilots for Mars. This includes the development of a new digital commerce platform that allows consumers to virtually gift packets of candy, and the creation of new consumer targeting models built from behavioural, emotional and search data (which have seen media results improve by up to 80%).

Launchpad has also helped Mars build solutions for On-Demand delivery and new models for click-and-collect ordering and use robotics and artificial intelligence to improve in-store stock compliancy and product fulfilment.

“Digital has revolutionised the consumer path to purchase; it’s dramatically impacted the behaviours of our consumers as well as retailers. And because this space is ever-changing, we must evolve with the mindset of fail fast, fail cheap,” says Arora. “We know not all new ideas work as expected and the key is for us to capture learnings and share across our brands and geographies. With Launchpad, it’s about discovering what’s possible, connecting the dots, and turning hypotheses into knowledge rapidly and inexpensively.”

### The dangers of losing control

Of course, these sorts of innovation programmes don’t come without challenges. Strong expertise without culture fit is a recipe for disaster, and employees can become quickly

disengaged by organisational resistance and the lack of support within key areas of the business. The recipe for success is to bring the outside in – hire experts, partner with the disruptors, and invest heavily in helping them to build a network and understand the culture, but also operate outside of normal company bounds.

“Because Launchpad has its own funding and support structure within our business, it gives us the freedom to take risks. The most important thing is that we are constantly analysing and assessing our performance, to ensure we improve our innovation playbook for next time,” says Arora. “There is so much change that even a company as big as Mars can’t find the smartest solutions as quickly as we need them. But by working with startups, embracing collaboration, we are letting our associates benefit from the strength of our existing culture, alongside outside expertise.”

The main benefit of working with startups is creating a culture of agility, and that should include the ability to take an innovation – along with new features, products and services you create with it – to market as rapidly as possible. Long-term value is also created for the startups by giving them a platform to sharpen their product, scale globally, and often a mutually beneficial partnership with a larger brand.

### **Building bespoke programmes**

Over the past two years, the MediaCom BLINK team has been working with clients, such as Mars, to help develop, shape and manage tech-focused innovation agendas designed to solve critical business challenges, navigate emerging technologies, and help drive growth for the future.

The best innovation programmes are tailored to the needs of specific companies and built to deliver innovation against their KPIs, which means even the failures teach them about their core areas of concern.

These programmes bring innovation to large corporates at the speed of today’s technological change. Once proven they can then be rolled out across the wider company

landscape, bringing growth to the whole company.

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