



i-teams

What are they?

The public sector equivalent of Silicon Valley's innovation labs. These small, action-oriented units apply academic research in behavioural economics and psychology to public policy and services, in pursuit of a specific goal (for example, reducing late payment of tax).

Is this a global phenomenon?

A recent report by UK innovation charity Nesta identified i-teams in 15 countries. They are especially popular in Scandinavia. Denmark's MindLab has used human-centred-design to ease online registration for new businesses. A new website, replacing the old confusing process which generated an error rate of 25 per cent, is set to pay back its investment 21 times over in three years.

What's behind the trend?

Governments realise they can make gains – and that can mean raising revenue, cutting costs or improving services – by adopting best practice to achieve certain goals that are common across the global public sector. They can also help engage disillusioned voters: the Seoul Innovation Bureau's workshops have collected input from 5 per cent of the city's population, which some analysts credit with winning mayor Park Won-soon re-election.

Who benefits?

Governments and communities. The UK's Behavioural Insights Team changed letters to late taxpayers to say most of their neighbours had paid, and helped raise £200 million of extra revenue. Singapore's i-team helped provide more holistic post-hospital care for ageing patients. A trial of 400 patients reduced the average number of re-admissions after six months by 66 per cent.

The bottom line

Although the big political challenges – economics, health, immigration – remain intractable, i-teams can resolve many issues quickly and cheaply and make a tangible difference to communities. The Seoul Innovation Bureau, for example, has launched a service offering tools and suitcases for residents to borrow. Ruth Puttick, who leads the i-teams initiative for Nesta, says there's no reason for every government to innovate from scratch. Much can be learned from what's working and what's not as governments confront an array of challenges. And in budget-conscious times, i-teams work: the Behavioural Insights Team has generated savings that are 22 times' its budget.



A strategic step out of the comfort zone

WHEN JOBS are evolving faster than job descriptions or titles, many organisations are siloed, and bosses want good people to stay where they have proved valuable, it can be hard to develop strategic leadership, says Professor Herminia Ibarra, whose book *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader* is due out in January.

“Every manager should be able to ask such questions as: ‘What are the trends in my business? Is what we’re doing aligned with them? What problems should we be solving?’ And ‘What needs are we not meeting?’ But this can be hard when you’re in the midst of it.”

Ibarra says: “One of the big benefits of cross-functional projects, networking across and outside the organisation and involvement in industry conferences is that it broadens your thinking beyond your limited speciality.”

That means breaking out of a comfort zone, where operational know-how and recognition keep you staying put. “The paradox of change is that the only way to alter the way we think is by doing the very things our habitual thinking keeps us from doing,” says Ibarra.

Herminia Ibarra is professor of organisational behaviour at INSEAD.



Ways to demystify mental health

MENTAL ILLNESS may be the last great workplace taboo – something Adrian Furnham is on a mission to redress. “Mental health literacy is now a very active area of research,” he says. “It concerns the extent to which lay people can identify a range of mental illnesses and how they react to them. This is particularly important in the workplace.”

In his book *Mental Illness at Work*, co-authored with psychologist Mary-Clare Race, Furnham argues that many organisations refuse to recognise the issue or are ignorant about it, affecting productivity, morale, attendance and staff retention. One in four people in the UK suffers a mental health problem each year and absences cost UK business more than £8 billion a year, so this attitude is untenable.

Furnham points out that organisations can exacerbate the problem, by making people ill and by having powerful, but disturbed, leaders whose pathology shapes the company's psychological culture. Leaders can start to improve, he says, by asking themselves: “Is my organisation a toxic one that attracts and breeds certain behaviours? And does my style of management create a set of conditions that could cause people to develop problems?”

Adrian Furnham is a professor of psychology at University College London.



How do you perceive the world?

CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE, says Professor Soon Ang, is the ability to manage in culturally diverse settings.

She and other academics tested this in a joint study with 126 Swiss military officers with domestic and cross-border leadership responsibilities. Indications were that cultural intelligence was a strong predictor of cross-border leadership effectiveness.

Companies looking to globalise their business to deliver growth, need leaders who are comfortable in different cultures. Yet a McKinsey report on developing new leaders noted that, while 76 per cent of senior executives believed their company needed to develop global leadership capabilities, only 7 per cent felt they were doing so effectively. Diversity is part of the solution. The Alliance for Board Diversity reports that 73 per cent of Fortune 500 directors are white men, and Ang says organisations need to get smarter at developing managers with multicultural perspectives, to balance local and global demands and work with many cultures simultaneously.

Leaders with high cultural intelligence consider their cultural assumptions and knowledge, adapting their behaviour appropriately.

Soon Ang is Goh Tjoei Kok chaired professor at Nanyang Business School.



YOLANDA CONYERS HR LEADERS MUST BUILD GLOBAL ORGANISATIONS BUT CHANGE HOW THEY THINK ABOUT BUSINESS

ARRANGING A MEETING ought to be a straightforward task in business. But after three months working in Beijing, it was still proving difficult for me. The reason eventually became clear: the word “request”, when translated into Mandarin, is something you do to a subordinate, not a peer or boss. Rather surprisingly, I had been ruffling feathers with my style.

Everything about Beijing was an adjustment. Even something as simple as making your electricity come on at home was very different from what I was used to in the US. But it taught me that relying on a single, western way of doing things has had its day.

I was in China as part of the process of transitioning Lenovo [founded by Liu Chuanzhi in 1984] into a global business, following the acquisition of IBM's PC division. We've completed major acquisitions in the nine years since then, with American, German and Brazilian firms among them, but if you walked up to any of our employees today they would say they were part of an international business rather than being tied to a national culture.

Reaching such a point cannot take place without HR. At Lenovo, that

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meant setting up multiple headquarters in different parts of the world, and becoming adept at hiring locally and identifying regional leaders. We made English our standard language, which was a big move, particularly in China: our leaders there had learned English at school but had rarely used it.

I decided to move to China because I believe HR has to immerse itself in the company culture to facilitate genuine change. Culture today is equal to strategy in driving business

“Culture today is equal to strategy in driving business growth and we have ensured we understand both”

growth and, in HR, we have ensured we understand both. We hold town halls where business leaders update us on products and performance and we

arrange an event where our top 100 executives come together to talk about inclusion, social media and the integration of acquisitions. But we also ensure we develop the skills we need to both innovate and compete, and to integrate our people into what we call the “Lenovo Way”.

That requires a different way of thinking about HR. We do a lot of compromising, coach and mentor a lot, are open to taking risks, we're humble and we don't rely on our past success. We're constantly learning – and not just how to avoid causing offence when you start a new job.