

Learning from startups: embracing disruptive innovation

If you want to get really valuable insights into how companies should operate in order to succeed - today, and particularly in the future - there's no better well of information than startup entrepreneurs from the region.



Image by 123RF

Every day, they are working in the trenches of innovation, disruption and even disruptive innovation, so they need to understand how to ride these forces. That makes them laser focused on the weaknesses of traditional leadership styles in this changing world.

[In a conversation about innovation and disruption](#), a group of regional startup leaders talk about harnessing innovation and managing the disruptions that will affect virtually all industries.

Khaled Zaatarah, founder and CEO of [phone-app 360VUZ](#) in Jordan, began by observing that innovation and disruption are different. While innovation is about problem solving in a new way, disruption is about “changing the whole market, the whole industry.”

Khalifa Al Jaziri, co-founder and group managing director of UAE-based [e-home automation](#), added that innovation implies survival for a company because “without innovation, you will be left behind.”

The group discussed how GE’s evolution from a purely industrial company to a digital industrial company allowed it to “touch more lives,” as Khaled put it, since “industrial won’t reach as far without digital.” Ahmed Saad, co-founder and CEO of [Crowd Analyzer](#), an Egyptian-based Arabic-language-focused social media monitoring platform, added that GE was able to see that its customers were going digital and understood that it needed to go digital too.

This ability to listen, to be open and to see what’s around you was a point of strong agreement by those in the conversation. They cautioned that too often, leaders at the top of the organisational pyramid lose touch with the rest of the organisation and even the market. “They need to listen, they need to respond; they need to adapt,” said Ahmed.

Even though disruption is “overwhelming sometimes,” said Nadine Nehme, research & medical chief of UAE-based [Medicus – Understand Your Health](#), “you have to embrace it, go with it, otherwise you will be left behind.”

These participants were speaking during a GE-hosted gathering of SMEs from across the Middle East and North Africa region that was designed to share experiences and best practice, and demonstrate how collaboration across organizations of all sizes can breed success. During the event, several conversations were held on different topics with a mix of leaders from these organizations.

GE is a strong supporter of the region’s startups and SMEs. This includes supporting regional programs to develop these companies – such as [Wamda and its MEMakers website](#) and the [Sylabs co-working space Algeria](#). It also comes through collaboration through its growing regional supply chain that supports GE regional manufacturing and maintenance facilities in countries such as [Algeria](#), [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), [Saudi Arabia](#) and [Kuwait](#).

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