

Disruptive thinking in the digital age



By [Rirhandzu Shingwenyana](#)

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What is disruptive thinking? How many times have you heard leaders of big companies say we need disruptive marketing campaigns? But many of these people don't mean what they say or perhaps don't understand what disruptive thinking is.



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Inward and outward disruptive thinking

How do you mean something that you, yourself don't know what it really means? You don't know what it takes to be disruptive? It's not to say that a big company can't do it. Of course, they can. Discovery has done it through its Discovery Bank which is a prime example of disruptive thinking of inward and outward.

The reality is that big companies spend too much time looking inward, rather than outward. Big companies are consistently looking at themselves as category leaders, and neglect looking outside their glass office for opportunities to disruptive the category they pride themselves the leaders of.

In-ward disruptive thinking is about looking at yourself as a company and your category and gauge what is it that you can do that is unconventional to push your business to the edge. By so doing, your company will yield or maximise the advantage that you are already enjoying.

Then, there's out-ward disruptive thinking. For example, Steve Jobs once said that "Sometimes customers don't know what they want until you give it to them", thus is equally important to be an outward disruptive thinker and give your customers what they want but not yet known to them.

In essence, disruption needs to be institutionalised. Unfortunately, *traditional companies are structured in a manner that creates systemic biases that kill disruptive thinking through inherent normative determinism; when belt-tightening happens, as it inevitably does, guess which biggest budget disappears?*

At the heart of business strategy and growth planning

Disruptive thinking, it is actually the best bet if companies need to stay relevant in the current junction, where everything is digitalised. Earlier I cited Discovery Bank as a prime example of disruptive thinking from a company that was founded years before disruptive thinking became a buzzword.

In fact, big companies can be disruptive in their own respect since they have resources to embark into intensive research projects through their existing research and development department. Unlike smaller or start-up companies who are just scraping the ground to fund their day to day operation. So embarking in an intensive research project could cost more than an arm and a leg, however, is essential if you want to be innovative and disruptive.

With that being said, disruptive thinking has been given as much importance as your day-to-day top-line drive. Disruptive thinking should not be an afterthought kind of thing. It should be placed at the heart of business strategy and growth planning.

Leaders of companies must be champions and advocates for disruptive thinking, category-redefining and provocative thinking should be given a real voice at the top table. The CEO is the company support an initiative and usually, these people feel an internal burn to deliver exceptional outcomes. The time to play safe is obsolete. The digital technology has switched up the entire game. There is no more ample time to play safe. Take this time, and cultivate disruptive thinking.

Innovation should be the priority

Usually, big companies or brands do not avail sufficient funds and isolate people responsible for disruptive thinking. Even the language sometimes create the perception that this is not a critical business. It's critically important that executives are well involved in disruptive thinking, especially in driving some of the systemic changes that have business impact.

Broaden terms of reference

If you are in the business of insurance like the Discovery, it vital to move innovatively into other sectors which will broaden your frame. Discovery started an insurance company and strategically moved into health sector through promoting a healthy lifestyle. Discovery implemented inward and outward disruptive thinking and ventured into the banking sector. Through all this, Discovery has broadened its framework in a very disruptive and innovative way.



Discovery gets bank licence

Hilary Joffe 17 Oct 2017



Think about a world where your brand doesn't exist

Are you endangered species, is disruptive and innovative companies cannibalising you due to the mere fact that you are afraid of harnessing disruptive thinking? It is said that print media is on the decline because of digital media is taking over the market and how people today are consuming news.

Is there any other way that print media houses can embark on disruptive and innovative thinking to try and find ways to at least keep themselves afloat for the next decade? What existential threats are already out there, be it regulatory control, competitive threat or consumer behaviour? Marketing, advertising, and communications books always use the Kodak scenario as a classic example of encouraging a way of thinking that will foster genuine disruption thinking.

When all is said and done, James Hidden says, “Disruption cannot be the remit of the mad scientist in the wacky innovation lab, occasionally paraded out as proof of forwarding thinking for earnings calls, but in reality, underfunded and underappreciated.”

ABOUT RIRHANDZU SHINGWENYANA

Rirhandzu Shingwenyana is a marketing, advertising and communications professional with experience in account management, social media and digital marketing campaign management.

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