Skill Toolkit

COMPETITION
CROSS SECTOR ANALYSIS

Every field gets entrenched in their own ways of seeing problems and finding solutions. Analyzing issues across sectors encourages you to think about a problem from the perspective of another field, develop a broader system-wide understanding of problems and issues, and propose new possible solutions.

THE STORY

Joshua and Tom work with Pamoja Media, an interactive marketing firm based in Nairobi, Kenya. "We look at the web and mobile platforms and try and figure out what's the most effective way for profit and not-for-profit organizations to use these platforms to communicate and achieve their goals." Pamoja is working with farmers who are struggling to remain profitable in an era of declining agricultural sustainability. Farmers once relied on traditional methods to determine weather patterns, select crop seed, and price goods, but issues such as climate instability have reduced farm productivity. Without the technology to gather data on climate change, many small-scale farmers see themselves getting left behind.

To help farmers rebuild their livelihood, Joshua and Tom began by asking questions about what resources could help to make agriculture more productive. They used their expertise to build media platforms to help farmers access the information needed. But these solutions did not solve another major problem. Faced with fears that rural farming was slowly becoming a dying enterprise, young people in these agricultural villages had been leaving for cities at an alarming rate. This was contributing to reduced population and a slowly aging group of farmers in rural villages.

Joshua and Tom started to realize that the problem of developing agricultural sustainability would need many different solutions. They began talking to people outside of the agricultural field to see if they could understand the problem in a different way. When they spoke with young Africans who had left rural areas they learned that the problem of rural poverty did not center on the decline of the agricultural sector alone. While many of these young people left their home villages because of the instability of farm labor, many others moved away because of the lure of modern technology that was available in urban centers. Young men and women were interested in exploring new kinds of job opportunities working with comput-

ers, engaged in web-based communication, and connecting to the global world. And yet this pattern of rapid urbanization was leading to a youth bulge in cities with too many young people looking for work and not enough jobs to support them.

Joshua and Tom now saw the problems of rural and urban sustainability as connected and framed their task differently. Pamoja had started their work by addressing the problems created by climate change and information access, but now they saw the connections to population shifts, youth education and employment. Pamoja now works across sectors to connect issues related to agriculture, climate change and instability, and population studies more directly with communications, technology, computer science and job development. Agricultural work of the future might also focus on building technology platforms to improve access to market, weather and transportation data; and developing communication tools and social media networks to link sellers and buyers in new and more productive ways. Pamoja's projects continue to enhance access to the crucial data and information that supports successful contemporary farming, while also preparing young people in the burgeoning agricultural sector who do not have to be farmers themselves.

◂◂ For more information visit
Pamoja Media
http://pamojamedia.com/

DESCRIPTION

Different industries have different thinking processes. Innovation takes place at the intersection of fields, disciplines and sectors. Each of these distinct spaces has shared knowledge, language, and practices so that people can work together. Think of this as the "ways of knowing", the "ways of speaking" and the "ways of doing" that are unique to any given field, and are shared among the people who seek to participate in discussions about the area of interest. This includes the literature and research that is used to understand issues, preferred terminology and jargon that is used to debate ideas, and skills and methods that are used to determine beliefs about the source of problems and the best practices to most effectively address them.

Cross sector analysis involves the cross-pollination of ideas across seemingly disparate spaces. By convening diverse participants in unfamiliar venues and by supporting dialogue and exchange across the typical ways of knowing, speaking and doing, social innovation can promote the blending of ideas to foster innovation. The goal of a cross-sector analysis is to use the thinking processes of another filed to ask different questions that lead to more innovative answers. Reframing questions will take you off the expected path and there you may find new possibilities that were unknown at the outset.

DEVELOPING AN INNOVATION MINDSET

Cross sector analysis asks that you question your assumptions about a problem, consider whether you are asking the right questions, understand that there are in fact many possible questions and answers, and reframe questions to get more innovative answers.

HOW TO

Step 1

Do the Research

Review basic research to get a clear understanding of a problem or issue. Seek out information from a variety of sources including experts in your field, other people with knowledge about an issue, news media and television reports, academic literature and quantitative data.

Ask questions such as:

- What does this source say about this issue?
- Why does this problem exist?
- What does the research say is the answer?

Use these related skills: Question, Survey, Interview

Note: Use the skills outlined in sideways learning to develop local perspectives on the problem.

Note: The next few steps do not have to happen in order.

Back to the story

Pamoja knew that the problem of declining agricultural economy in Kenya was complex. They spoke to farmers, climatologists and agricultural scientists and learned all they could about contemporary farming. It became clear that unpredictable environmental crises such as drought and disease could have a detrimental effect on crop yield forcing rural villages into extreme poverty. Research showed that access to technology and information could improve the situation. Pamoja wanted to use their expertise to improve access to data and information about climate change to create more stability during planting, harvest and selling periods.

Step 2

Map the Research

Create graphic organizers and maps to construct a picture of the factors that influence the issue. Visual aids can help you to see patterns and relationship that may be different when viewing the data independently. A simple way to do this is to write a single factor onto a sticky note or blank card. Then begin to move these around, grouping factors according to themes that you see.

Step 3

Question the Research

Analyze what you have learned with skepticism to uncover gaps in what you have learned. Consider how different accounts align with or contradict other discussions of the issue. This is a tricky step and you sometimes have to talk to others, who don't know what you know, to ask them what you may have missed.

Ask questions such as:

- Whose perspective does this information represent?
- Whose perspectives are not included?
- What changes if you view this data/information from another perspective?
- What different problems emerge and seem more important from alternative perspectives?

Use these related skills: Critique

Back to the story

Tom and Joshua realized that most of their understanding about rural life was gained by talking to farmers who were still living in villages and trying to make their farms more productive. These were typically aging farmers whose children had left the village to find work in nearby cities. Joshua and Tom decided to talk to some of these young men and women about their choice to leave their homes. They learned that many of these youth were eager to work in the growing technology sector and their departure from rural villages was not solely the result of failing farms.

Step 4

Cross Analyze the Research

Seek out expertise from multiple sources to review the initial analysis – both your preliminary research and your understanding of the gaps. Intentionally choose to speak with experts outside of your field and review case studies from other contexts to see how others have addressed similar problems. Challenge yourself to learn about the topic in many ways because this will likely introduce you to many versions of the problem.

Ask questions such as:

- What can we learn from this data from the perspective of another field? *(Ex. What would a climatologist say is the root cause of this problem? How would that differ from what a sociologist says is the reason for this problem?)*
- What can we learn from this data from the perspective of another context? *(Ex. How does the same issue play out differently in another country?)*
- What additional evidence could help us to understand the data that we have?
- Who can we speak to and what can we read to learn more about some aspect of the problem?

Use these related skills: Data Analysis, Interview, Survey, Create

Back to the story

Further research in fields such as sociology, political science, and economics led Joshua and Tom to bigger questions. Understanding reasons for "the youth bulge" in developing countries helped Joshua and Tom to see another picture of why rural communities were rapidly declining and link that to the potentially detrimental effects of excessive populations in urban areas. New questions emerged: What other aspects of the agricultural profession might attract youth and prevent them from leaving rural areas for cities? Is it possible to modernize the agricultural industry amidst changing technological advances and a declining workforce? How could young people be prepared for jobs in a new agricultural economy?

Step 5

Map the Analysis

Create a new map or graphic organizer to highlight the new aspects of the issue that you have learned through cross analysis. Include root causes and potential solutions that emerged from your analysis. Review the map to reconsider the way you framed the initial inquiry. Keep in mind that there are many possible questions and thus answers.

Ask questions such as:

- Are we asking the right questions? What other questions are relevant to this problem?
- What aspect of this issue have we not discussed?
- How can we think about this differently?
- What if...?

LIMITATIONS

- While local knowledge is an important resource, cross sector analysis depends on information form a wide range of sources. This process requires access to research, experts, and case studies.

RESOURCES

- **Recipes for Systemic Change**
  This publication of the Helsinki Design Lab Studio demonstrates how experts and designers dedicated to solving the world's most complex issues come together across sectors to analyze, reframe, and identify alternative solutions.
  http://helsinkidesignlab.org/peoplepods/themes/hdl/downloads/In_Studio-Recipes_for_Systemic_Change.pdf
- **The Honeybee Network**
  The Honeybee Network maintains a database of NGOs, local farmers, and grassroots organizations with a record of innovative ideas and solutions to "cross-pollinate" across sectors and help others who are struggling with similar issues.
  http://www.sristi.org/hbnew/
- **Positive Deviance**
  Positive Deviance looks to all community members to identify community issues that require support. Their resources include training manuals, magazines and journals that address all facets of community action.
  http://www.positivedeviance.org

References
Geoff Mulgan, NESTA – National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts, UK

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