Technical Innovations in the Pacific

A HANDBOOK

Maybe you're a technical agency looking to create some social good with your work, a development practitioner looking for new ways to do development or even someone who wants to expand how you operate in your chosen field.

You have an idea for a technical innovation you think might work in the Pacific, but you don't know where to start.

If that sounds like you, read on - this handbook is for you.

Let's be clear about this - it *will* be challenging. Technical innovations in the Pacific are not like technical innovations in other parts of the world. There are a few things you may want to consider when designing and delivering your innovation. That's what this handbook is all about.

Technical innovation can mean many things to many people. To put it simply, technical innovation is a combination of technologies that integrate and interact to make products or services really sing.

And why on earth should you listen to us?

Our company, SecondMuse, helped to deliver two technical innovation pilots in Fiji and Tonga with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's innovationXchange. The pilots were created by two Australian companies, S1T2 and Millipede, and used a combination of virtual reality, app games, posters, flashcards and storybooks to address issues of over and under nutrition in Pacific primary schools. With the two pilot teams, we visited over 20 schools across Fiji and Tonga, running VR experiences and delivering tablet devices to incredible people in some pretty remote places. We learned a lot from these projects and want to share some of our top tips with people who are thinking of doing a similar thing themselves.

Innovation is about trialling and testing new approaches and seeing what works best. This is a handbook, not a rule book, and we hope it helps.

1 Take Discovery Missions

2 Co-create with Local Partners

3 Know Your Environment

4 Build Your innovation

5 Share, Adapt, Share Again

6 Trial Your Tech

Take Discovery Missions

Taking initial trips to the country you are thinking of working is an essential first step in any technical innovation project.

It's easy to make sweeping generalisations about the Pacific or any country, really. You'll probably find some of them in this handbook. But it's important to recognise that the Pacific is not one place. Each country has its own distinct history, traditions and cultures that need to be acknowledged and respected if you, an outsider, are going to have any impact there. The countries themselves are also incredibly diverse and, in some cases, can be made up of hundreds of different islands, each with different environments and ways of living.

We've found that you really need to be in a place to truly learn about it, and you will only know if your project is a good fit by meeting the people who live there and speaking with them directly.

Things like video calls aren't as commonplace in the Pacific as in other parts of the world. In a lot of cases, you're going to have to get on a plane and meet with people face-to-face.

We approached these trips as opportunities for discovery. A time for us to listen to stories, taste the food, hear the sounds, smell the smells, and take in everything we could. A lot of the relationships that became central to the pilot projects were established on these initial trips. Take them. You won't regret it.

Listen to stories

Taste the food

Take in everything

2　Co-create with Local Partners

In the process of helping to solve a problem, co-creating with those experiencing it is the best way to make sure it works and keeps working long after you have gone.

Local partners can range from the head of a government ministry to the coach of a local sports team. What makes them so special is that they understand their own environment - natural, social and political - in ways that you almost certainly never could. They can also provide a valuable perspective on the problem you are trying to address and will have a pretty darn good sense of how your project will be received. They can provide you with essential advice on how to make your idea more appropriate for their culture. This can be something as simple as using the right shade of red, or as significant as wearing the correct clothes when meeting royalty.

Relationships are extremely important in the Pacific, and trust must be earned. A local partner with good standing in the community can get you into the rooms you need to be in, meeting with the people you need to meet. Once there, of course, it's up to you to demonstrate that you were worth that initial show of faith. But a local partner can get you in the room.

More than just insights and connections, local partners have a vested interest in your project succeeding. So make them a true co-creator of your project. Like anyone, anywhere, they want things to improve for their communities and their country. They work with incredible generosity, commitment, and dedication to help make that happen.

Build relationships

Listen to different perspectives

Co-create

3 Know Your Environment

As much as possible, identify the potential risks and roadblocks you will face in the environment you are working, and implement measures in advance to mitigate them.

There are some things you won't be able to anticipate, like a cyclone damaging the majority of your pilot sites. But, even in the case of natural disaster, you can take measures to address the risk they pose. For instance, you can avoid scheduling your trips to a Pacific country during peak cyclone season (and yes, before you ask, we did schedule some of our trips during peak cyclone season).

Natural disasters are a significant, and quite literal, environmental factor you will need to consider; however, smaller factors should also be taken into account. Seemingly simple things, such as knowing the dates when public holidays fall, can be the difference between a community full of participants, and an empty village.

Especially in technical innovations, your product or solution may require a minimum technical infrastructure to operate. So check and double check that it exists before deploying somewhere that your tech is not built for.

It is inevitable that you will be caught off guard one, two, fifty times throughout your innovation project. But that doesn't mean you should make yourself an easy mark. Your local partners may be able to help you identify some of these risks but you should make sure you are as prepared as possible. In short, do your research.

Do your research

Listen to your partners

Anticipate risks

(4) Build Your Innovation

Build out your innovation to the point of near-completion before implementing in the Pacific.

When testing an innovation at the pilot stage, you can usually get away with creating a prototype that is a rough indication of what the final product will become. In our experience, this simply does not fly in the Pacific. For our innovations to be approved and supported locally, we needed to create what was essentially a finished product with final stage art design and professional voice recordings. Every detail needed to be polished as though it was being released to the whole country.

It's understandable. The Pacific Islands see a lot of people flying in with new ideas that need their help to implement. But a lot of these ideas, at least in their early stages, are not yet culturally appropriate, and require design changes in order to be relevant to the people who will be interacting with them. Details can make or break an innovation.

But by building out your innovation beyond the stage of a prototype, you will be able to work with your local partners to ensure every detail is appropriate for their culture.

This does mean a more sizeable investment in your innovation up front, as it takes time and money to get that polish just right. But doing so can mean the difference between an idea that is championed and supported, or one that withers away in a pile on someone's desk.

Build your innovation

Take on feedback

Add polish

⑤ Share, Adapt, Share Again

Check in with your local partners and collaborators at different points throughout the design and development process to make the most of their knowledge and insights.

You've travelled to the country where you want to implement your project. You've spoken to the people there, listened to their ideas, formed partnerships and identified key collaborators. It's likely that you will have to return to your home country for the development phase of your tech innovation, but this does not mean your communication with the Pacific ends.

Travelling to the region once or twice at the beginning of your project is not enough. If your local partners can pick up on potential problems or issues with your prototype as it's being built, that will help you to make the best solution possible. This can save you lots of time and money in the long run.

It may not be feasible for you to travel back to the Pacific during this time yourselves, but this is where a local team or team representative can be invaluable. With their knowledge of the project and connections on the ground, they will be able to get your prototype in front of the people who need to see it and gather their feedback for you.

Listen to what they have to tell you and make sure you incorporate their ideas into the next iteration of your prototype. If you take time in the beginning to establish strong, mutually beneficial relationships, you will be able to trust in your local partners' advice because you're working together towards the same goal.

Share your innovation

Adapt your innovation

Share again

6   Trial Your Tech

Start small and trial your technology under one set of conditions. That way, you can work out the kinks before expanding out to different districts or countries.

As prepared as you try to be, there are inevitably going to be things about your innovation that do not work. Some of your fundamental assumptions may be wrong. The infrastructure might fail you. People may not respond the way you hoped. The tech itself might break down, or cease working at all.

It's much better to learn about these things on a pilot than once you've gone country-wide, or even region-wide with your idea. You should make sure that everyone involved understands the trial-like nature of your project from the very beginning. This will help to avoid setting expectations you will be unable to meet. Instead, you'll be creating an incredible learning opportunity for yourselves and your partners.

You have the chance to try something that has never been done before, in a truly spectacular part of the world. If you are open, humble and generous with yourselves, your idea, and your time, you will receive the same in return.

Good luck!

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