

SMASHING THE ROADBLOCKS

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hello and welcome to the Accenture Vaahini Connect podcast! Season 1 is all about practical ways to bring our more innovative selves alive at work.

In each episode, join us to meet a successful woman who shares her innovative journey, and what we can learn and apply from it. We bring you tangible ideas on how you can stay innovative, no matter what your work consists of.

Hi, I'm Padma Priya, an independent journalist and your host for this podcast!

In this episode, we discuss how to smash the roadblocks to innovation. Whether it is the stress of delivering immediate results, or too many interruptions that prevent deep thinking, all of us face roadblocks to innovation. For women, the double burden of greater caregiving responsibilities at home, also adds to it.

In this episode, we talk to Dr. Sunita Maheshwari, the Co-Founder of TelRadSol, a pioneer in teleradiology solutions from India, on concrete ways to deal with these roadblocks.

We talk to her today on the challenges with staying innovative, especially as one's responsibilities increase, and how we can deal with these to thrive at work.

Welcome Dr. Sunita, today we'll be talking to you on the challenges with staying innovative, especially as one's responsibilities increase, and how can we deal with all this to thrive at work. So, starting off, Dr. Sunita, when you started your company in India, it was a time when teleradiology concept was very new. From launching a concept then to today, when

the concept itself has now become more mainstream, what does innovation look like to you? And do you think the nature of innovation has changed?

Yeah, that's an interesting question. I think, you know, when we launched teleradiology, almost 20 years ago, it was an unheard-of concept, sending CT scans and x-rays from one place, like from America to India for reporting, that itself had not been done. And so, it was very much, you know, an innovative concept. Interestingly, during the COVID pandemic, a public health expert told us that it looked like we had been preparing for the pandemic for the last 15 years! But really what we were doing then was considered innovative. But if you looked at it today, it's just what you know, everybody does and how healthcare is overall working, with everything becoming digital.

So, I think in my book, you know, innovation is essentially about finding solutions - an idea, it could be a new idea. It could be a new method, it could be a new product, it could be anything that helps change the way we're doing things. Now, when we started, as I said, teleradiology was a very new concept, it was considered innovative. Today, it's mainstream. But while we've been on this journey of teleradiology, we've had so many challenges. So for instance, we are a healthcare delivery organization. We have to provide services 365 days, which means we need enough staffing every Sunday. Now, you know, people want their days off on Sunday. So, we started looking at like, how do we staff our Sundays, and then we hit upon, why don't we hire people in geographies in the world where Sunday is not a holiday? And so, we started hiring doctors and staff in Israel, and in the



Middle East, where Sunday is a regular working day. So, I would say this is an example of service delivery innovation. You know, it looks like it's a small idea, or a small thing to do, but it actually transformed the lifework balance for our people here in India and in the US and we were able to balance our workloads.

Similarly, initially we used to read off our clients' stacks; so, every hospital has their own technology – our doctors would login and report the case on their technology. Now that was fine when we were covering 3 hospitals but when you are covering 100 hospitals and have 60 different doctors, logging into 10 different systems was utter chaos. We said, this is not going to work! So, we got a bunch of engineers together and asked them to build us a radiology workflow that sits on top of all these hospital techs. That's how we ended up building a tech workflow called RADSpa, but for our doctors they are just reading up on one system. This would be an example of using technology to innovate in one's workflow.

The fundamental nature of innovation has not changed over the years, you know, that concept of thinking laterally to find the solution. What has changed, perhaps in the years is more utilization of technology in this space, so when you are innovating, you are thinking of where can I put my next Artificial Intelligence algorithm, where can I use tech to make this more efficient?

And I think the second thing that has changed, really, is the speed of innovation and I think COVID has really taught that. So for instance, you know, during COVID and I can give you know, you know, an example from my own experience; we run a chain of primary care clinics in Bangalore. During April and May, when the lockdown was there, there were zero patients coming to our clinics. Suddenly, you've got like a team of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and nobody's coming to see them, right. So, the teams had to reinvent themselves very quickly because we realized everyone's at home, they want homecare, they want telemedicine, they want us to drop the pharmacy items off at their home. So, we had to rethink, and the teams had to reschedule themselves, we reduced the number of people sitting in our clinic, but we

increased our homecare capabilities. Now, when we did that, we found we didn't have enough cars, we didn't have enough ambulance drivers, we didn't have enough drivers to deliver this medicine and the pulse oximeter and whatever was needed to patients' homes. Then everyone's like, okay, should we be buying a car? Should we, you know, hire more drivers? What should we do? And we were brainstorming, and someone on the whatsapp group says, hey, why can't we use the Swiggy app? Or Dunzo, you know, the app to deliver our medicines. And someone else was like, hey, that's a great idea. And so that's what we did. We used Swiggy and Dunzo, and all the apps out there, and we modified it for our own use, which was to deliver all our pharmacy items and pulse oxys and things that our patients needed.

A company doesn't need a chief innovation officer necessarily to innovate. It needs every individual thinking, how can I do this better? How can I do this quicker? How can I use tech to do it? Are there any new products that I can bring into my workspace? When you have that kind of energy of thinking that the way I do it tomorrow doesn't have to be the way I did it yesterday, I think that's when you have really, a culture of innovation.

Sometimes when we are solving problems at work, we do tend to use the same solutions that have worked in the past, even if they start delivering poor results; in your experience, what are the reasons we hesitate to try new solutions, have you ever faced such a situation and what helped you break the rut?

Have I faced such situations? The answer is yes. Why, I think is a trickier question, though. I think we're essentially creatures of habit. You know, if something's been done in a particular way, for a long time, most people don't even re-evaluate it, you know, because it's just the way it's been. So I think change in general is difficult, you know, most people don't necessarily want change. But the people who look at the processes and suggest changes, they're eventually the ones who bring value to an organization. And I think, you know, we use the Kaizen method, and that I think is a very good way of getting teams to work together to make small incremental changes



every day, every week, driven by a process.

Now, I'll give you an example in our own organization. We used to have it that each team could do their own schedule. And it worked very well for several years, because they used to plan among themselves, you know, how to ensure coverage. Now, as we grew, the teams kept saying that we are short staffed, we need more people. And when we actually evaluated, we found that if the teams were able to cross-cover each other, and cross-train each other, that would really help. So, they were making their schedules in silos. So, if there was an excess capacity in one team, on one day, that excess capacity wasn't helping the short-staffed team on that day. So, we brought in a resource planning team, they did centralized schedules, and suddenly the shortage that we had in each team, it magically disappeared.

That's great, but what led you to realising that you needed to break up the silos, and with the help of a resource planner?

Yeah, that's an interesting question, you know, that ideally, in my mind should have come from the teams themselves, right? But it didn't. So, it came from us saying, okay, we have a problem here and getting, you know, a crack HR person in and saying, can you figure out what is the issue here? Why are they so short staffed? So, you know, it came from an HR intervention, and then the HR person saying, oh, one second! She was a new person new to the system, while the others have been around for 10 years. So sometimes, an outside perspective helps when you're in a rut. So I'm very big on now saying, you know what, guys, we're stuck. How about we ask someone from another team or someone from another organization or bring in a consultant, or bringing in everyone into the room?

When you're stuck in a rut, first thing is someone has to recognize you're in a rut. And you know, in this particular case, it came, let's say from me. Then the person who recognizes it's an early has to say, Hey guys, we're stuck in a rut, then the second piece is okay, we want to get out of this rut, once you decide you want to get out of it, then you have 3-4 different options

from you know, a consultant, from an internal brainstorming, internal brainstorming, but with an external someone in the organization.

Also, when you're in a highly connected world, that can give us a lot of instant feedback, whether it is via social media or from colleagues, investors or customers. What are your thoughts on using feedback in a constructive way, towards innovating in your work, rather than getting distracted by it?

So, I think if you look at feedback, I mean, personally, I have one very simple mantra. I don't take it personally, and I know that's difficult to do. But I think if we, as individuals can say, I'm not going to take feedback personally, then you actually look; look and search for constructive feedback. So, for instance, if an individual wants to develop or grow themselves, as an individual, or in an organization, they should actually be seeking feedback, right? And it's not always easy to do because you don't want to hear negative things. But if you went to your team lead, and your colleague, and your whoever, and did a 360 on yourself and said, you know what, tell me one thing I should stop doing, one thing I should continue doing and one thing I should start doing, just starting with those three simple things, and say, give me feedback, if it's harsh, I'm willing to take it and work on it. That individual will grow amazingly well, in their personal life as well as professional life, because they have understood that constructive feedback is the only way they can really grow.

Specifically, for women, a common experience is that the stress of being a primary caregiver at home, which is often the case can be a problem. Sometimes women find that they are stretched between two one to many tasks, leading to less mental bandwidth to be creative. What are your thoughts with regards to this? And do you have any solutions on how this can be countered? To some extent?

I mean, I think women feel like they've got to get up at 6am and have this hot breakfast ready for everybody. You know, how about it being a family event where everybody gets in the kitchen and helps with the plates out and puts the toast in the toaster? Keeping it simple, I think really



helps and for sure, delegating. I think woman we tend to take on everything - I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it. It's okay to delegate. You know, okay, here are 10 tasks for the day, I'm going to do four, would you do two and you do those other two? Planning the day a little bit so that everybody in the family knows that breakfast, lunch and dinner, we're doing this. This is the time that mamma has to work. These are the times I need everyone to be quiet because I'm on a panel. You know, planning it and communicating that plan in the home, I think makes it much easier.

Personally, I think it's very important to set aside some time for thinking and writing and PowerPoint creation. It could be early morning before the kids get up, but also during the day, you know, if you get an idea, document it, put it down. So, I have a notepad on my phone and the minute I get some idea for, you know, business idea, or how we can do something at the clinic better, or how I can do some teaching better, anything, I just put it down in my notepad document it. Documenting it before you forget it, because a lot of creative ideas, they just come as we're going to sleep or, or when we're in the shower, so document those ideas in one place. So you can look at them again, when you have time to kind of reflect and do something about those ideas is very important; so that they don't kind of disappear and vanish into the universe, so to speak.

I think from an employee perspective, and feedback, you know, you tend to get a lot of feedback, you know, from colleagues, or you came late today, or what's happening with this, oh, you're looking very tired that day, I don't wear for instance, eyeliner 10 people will tell me how tired I'm looking, you know. So it's all kinds of feedback from how you look to what you're doing to what you're saying to how your performance is, and I think that can be very challenging, for you know, anyone working? So I think we need to as employees also put kind of filters on, on what is feedback that's going to actually make me better? I mean, who's giving me the feedback? Are they doing it in my best interest, so is this just chitter chatter that they're doing, which I can ignore, so kind of almost mentally dividing up the feedback in our head into useful feedback, not useful feedback; not

useful feedback, I'm letting it go, you know, in one ear and out the other and I know this is hard to do. But it goes back to that point of not take taking things personally, and understanding that people tend to be judgmental, people tend to give feedback, especially unwanted feedback which is the most annoying. So, I think, couple of you know, pointers there is for us as individuals to try and avoid giving unwanted feedback and unwanted advice. If somebody hasn't asked for our opinion, then let's not give it; if our opinion is asked for, let's give it in a very constructive fashion. If we feel we need to give feedback, then to also do it in a constructive fashion, which is to say, you know, hey, I'd like to give you feedback on a couple of things about your work, when can we sit down and talk about it?

So, this last part is a segment that we call, try this at work today. In this segment, we want to ask you to give us one actionable thing that we should try out at work that can help us smash a roadblock to innovation.

Okay, I'm gonna give you two actionable things. I think one is in the way we work. There's something I don't know if you've all heard of it, called the Pomodoro Technique, where you break up work into 25-minute blocks of very focused activity, followed by a five-minute break. Now what this does is, the idea is to focus on one activity for that 25 minutes, for that half an hour without multitasking. You know, we all tend to multitask a lot. But if we focus down on one activity, and say, okay, you know, I have this project report to complete, I am going to finish the first section of it in the next half an hour, put headphones on and just do that for that half an hour, it works wonders, it's a very efficient way of getting things done.

The second point, and this is for, you know, when you for individuals in an organization who have, let's say, an idea for how things could be done differently, what we talked about innovation, say they're thinking about how schedules are done, and they have a new idea for how it could be done. And as you go through the day, each day, you ask yourself, is there an easier way to do what we're doing? Is there a new app out there, constantly thinking about, is there a different way to do or a different segment



we could get into? Do I have a new idea? And once you feel you do, you take the effort to get organized with that idea, to research it, create a PowerPoint about that idea. And then ask for a time to present it to the team, or your seniors or management, and whoever it may be, and then make that presentation about that idea. And it could be a five minute presentation but it's a thought through presentation, which leaves time for discussion. And that's how we can bring new value to an organization. A lot of times, we have an idea and then we catch our manager, you know, at lunchtime and say, oh, I got this idea. And then he's like, okay, we'll look into it and then that's the end of the idea. But I think taking the idea and taking it to its next level by researching it, creating the PowerPoint, asking for a time to present it, and then if they all say, okay, bad idea, drop it, fine. But if they say great idea, you know, let's implement it. You know, raising your hand and saying, oh, I'd love to be part of the implementation team. So in a sense taking it from ideation stage to completion stage, in an organized fashion is I think one way for us to really bring new value to an organization, and to not have roadblocks to innovation, because we, we many times get kind of intimidated, because we feel firstly, we can't get an idea. And then we feel even if we get the idea, we can't do anything with the idea. But even if it's a tiny little idea that could make a difference, start with that tiny idea, but take it through to completion in terms of at least getting eyes and ears on it, and seeing whether it could further lead to innovation in the organization.

I hope you enjoyed listening to this episode as much as I enjoyed talking to Dr Sunita. To sum up, remember, innovation is within all of us and doesn't rest with one person within an organisation. So, if you have an idea, work on it and make a persuasive case for it within your organisation or team and make sure your voice is being heard!

Tell us what you thought about this episode and write to us with your feedback and questions. Also remember to join the Accenture Vaahini Network, a networking forum for women professionals, to further enrich you with varied perspectives. The link to join is in the description of this episode. Stay tuned for the next episode,

featuring another interesting innovator!

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