

PODCAST VAAHINI CONNECT | SEASON 1, EPISODE 3: BIG IDEA OR SMALL STEPS?

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to the Accenture Vaahini Connect Podcast. Season One is all about practical ways to bring our more innovative selves alive at work. In each episode, we look at innovation through the lens of a successful woman who shares her own journey, and see what we can learn and apply from it. In every episode, we also bring you tangible ideas on how you can stay innovative no matter what your work consists of. So, let's get going!

Hi, I'm Padma Priya. I'm an independent journalist and your host for this podcast. In this episode, we will discuss how small and incremental steps taken regularly can also help us innovate, rather than just waiting for that big idea. An iterative approach can be innovative in itself, but it also helps us feel productive and gives us a sense of achievement that motivates us to work further.

In this episode, we have with us Nida Hasan, the Country Head at Change.org, a platform that mobilizes people around petitions for social causes. Nida has been working with Change.org since 2014, and under her leadership, the platform has reached more than 25 million users and continues to grow.

So, Nida, at Change.org your work involves

getting the ordinary citizen involved in social issues. Can you tell us about one or two innovative actions that help you significantly ramp up the number of people involved?

Right, so Padma Priya I started working at Change.org in 2014. And the idea of digital campaigning was very new to the people of our country. They didn't quite understand how to use Change.org, the platform that was offered to them, the technology tools that were offered to them. So, in the beginning, we saw a lot of campaigns, which were basically asking the wrong thing from the wrong person. To give you like a few examples, in the beginning, we saw a campaign, which was asking the prime minister of the country to clean, you know, one neighbourhood in one part of the city. Now people's intentions were right. But the way they were going about it was not particularly what we call smart. Now SMART is an acronym. I love acronyms, acronyms. It's kind of like you know how you set SMART goals or organizations set small SMART goals, where S stands for specific, M stands for measurable, A stands for achievable, R stands for Responsible where the person who is actually responsible for making things happen is addressed in the campaign and T stands for time bound. But we were not seeing very smart goals or smart campaigns that were



coming. So what we did was, we started working with people who started petitions on Change.org and help them curate their asks in a way which made them smarter.

So let me give you an example. There was a woman who when I first spoke to her, she said I want to do something about gender stereotyping, and her big goal was to sensitize people on gender stereotyping in pop culture. Now her campaign asking the government to take action against gender stereotyping in movies or TV serials is just too vague, it's not likely to succeed. But a smart ask in this case, was to ask the producers of Chota Bheem to make Chutki's character stronger. This campaign was basically run by Almaz Virani, who was a single mother and she saw her son who was six years old, watching Chota Bheem and reenacting that with a cousin of his. Now Chota Bheem is a show which is watched by millions of kids around India, it has a huge presence. And the way Chota Bheem's character was portrayed was this boy who is you know, all strong and all powerful, and this girl Chutki is in two braids and always just feeding laddoos to Chota Bheem. So the big picture idea of what you want to change needs to be there, but unless you're smart about it, and you break it down into smaller, more achievable goals, you would be wasting a lot of your time and energy. So Almaz broke it down. And she asked, the producers to make the chutki's character stronger. And she won that campaign, she won that with just 9000 signatures.

Nida, you gave a very interesting anecdote just now, with this particular Change.org petition involving Chota Bheem and Chutki's character. Could you tell us a little more about how one of these innovations came about? Was there like one big aha moment? Or did you arrive at it through a series of steps? What helps you proceed in an iterative manner?

So there were a series of steps that we consciously chose to take. For example, we started a digital campaign and community building training in 2016. Now this program is called She Creates Change, where we train a cohort of 30 women through experiential learning and focus a lot on community building on how to become social change champions. The idea of

the program is basically to enable women to start sharing their stories and training them on how to become social change champions by giving them digital campaigning skills. So by focusing on training women, we were actually able to double the number of campaigns that was started on women's rights issues. And the campaigns which were started by this brilliant community of 150 women now, because we've been doing this training for the past four years, they were great role modelling examples for everyone else as well who signed or supported their campaigns.

So the next step, in our process of getting people used to the idea of digital campaigning, is to digitize the entire training and the resources, so that these tools, and these tips and guides are available to a large section of people. And it can be easily accessed, not just by a handful of people who've been trained, but it's available for anyone who wants to bring about positive social change.

What was that moment that led you to think okay, you know, we need to do this in a, you know, we have to take a certain series of steps, like, internally what led the change?

Right, right, right, right. So, in 2016, the platform was growing, it was, you know, we were getting a few good campaigns, but it was not seeing exponential rise, right. So I'm a very restorative person. And I looked at it and I said, Okay, this is something is not going right, what is it? And so we did a bit of data analysis, we looked at, like the number of campaigns that were being started, we looked at, like, how many was started by men? How many were started by women?

I'm a feminist at heart, so when I looked at the numbers, in 2016, there were only 23% of the campaigns which were started on Change.org by women. More than 70% of the campaigns were started by men. But the interesting thing here was out of those 23% campaigns started by women, a lot more were successful and won. And that number really sort of, you know, stood out for me and I said, you know, why is this happening? What is it that women are doing differently, that even though their numbers in terms of overall campaigns and the number of you know, online petitions that they are starting



is relatively low, they're actually winning more! So, I started this project, where we interviewed a series of women who had run successful campaigns. We also interviewed a few women who had just started their journey. We also did a few surveys. Now, both the qualitative and the quantitative research that we did threw up one thing that women are better storytellers. But more importantly, they are more committed in making their voice heard. So they don't leave the campaign midway. And that, for me was the 'aha' moment, you know, where I was like, okay, so we need to get more women to start using the platform. Because if you look at the internet users, well, the number of women using internet in India is still at 25%. And for Change.org, also, it made sense for us, if our end goal was to get good, smart, quality campaigns going, we had to get more women to start using the platform in the most effective way. And that was the starting point of she creates change.

I mean, it was like you were almost learning from the community itself. Nida when adopting an iterative approach, are there some safeguards we need to put in place? Like how do we know that we're not thinking too small, but working towards a larger end goal? Or how do we know when something is not really working as it should and does not deserve further time and resources. What has your experience been, regarding this?

I think it's extremely important to be self-critical and to take periodic breaks in between whatever you're doing to analyze what you're doing, what you're doing, and where you're putting all your energy. So, I do that constantly. For example, two days in the week, I have a calendar slot for 30 minutes, which is called evaluation time. It's usually towards like, you know, the end of my day. But basically, I use this half an hour to think, just think; this is my thinking time, I use something which is part of actually CBT, which is cognitive behavioral therapy and there's something that they teach you there, which is, which is STOP. This is another acronym, oh, my God, I'm using a lot of acronyms today. But STOP basically stands for: S is just stop, which means stop whatever you're doing and take a pause. T is to take a breath. So I start with just you know, breathing

five or six times and just reconnecting with my breath so that I'm, I'm completely present in that moment. The next step is Observe. Notice, you know, what is happening? Is the work that you're doing, is it meaningful? Is your strategy on the right track? Has anything changed in the external environment, which you need to become conscious of? And does that change your plans in any way? Is your eye still on the prize? You know, are you moving towards the big end goal, even though, you know, you're taking much smaller steps right now. And once you've done that, then P stands for Proceed, which is, either you continue doing what you were doing, because you've analyzed that, yes, this makes sense. Or you completely change the course. But the important thing here is that you do it mindfully. And so I do this on a weekly basis, where I have my big goals and I don't think about the yearlong strategy every week, but every week, I look at like, is the work that I'm doing that week or the priorities that have laid down that week.

I think that was a great point about working mindfully. Nida all of us have off days at work when we just don't feel creative or innovative. Does this happen to you as well? And how do you deal with it?

Well, I actually don't feel creative or innovative most of the time. You know, my natural state of being is restorative which means that I'm always looking at what needs to be fixed, what's not working, and then figuring out solutions around that. But the important thing here is that I'm self-aware, I know that I am more of a logical person, that I'm not the most creative person in the room, not the most innovative person in the room. And what you know, being self-aware has helped me to do is to build a team around me, that was filled with way more creative and more innovative ideas than I could ever come up with. And as the person who leads the team, all I really need to do is make sure that everyone in the room, everyone in the office has a very safe space to express themselves, to ideate, to share, to come up with solutions that nobody else is thinking of.

Okay, so with my team, what we do is once a year we have like strategy meetings and I know for a lot of people, strategy meetings



can be really boring. And so usually, you know, the executive leadership meets and figures out how to lay down the strategy for the entire organization.

We do it slightly differently when we involve everybody. And t we usually do it in a fun environment outside of our working space, you know, outside of the office, of course. But the intention of going into that meeting is that no idea is bad, right? No matter what you're doing, everybody's work is interconnected with the other person's. So no idea is bad, throw it all out there, and together, we will figure this out. So that's something that we do once a year. But other than that, as well, whenever we have meetings, or we're thinking about smaller projects, like, for example, if there's elections coming up, and we have to figure out, kay, what is it that means that Change.org needs to do? And how do we set ourselves apart in these elections? What is it that we can do, and I involve everybody in the team, it's not just the people who are part of, you know, the Campaigns team or Communications team, it's even the Operations staff, you know, because they are seeing this work from a different lens altogether. So the Operations people, Finance people, everybody comes together, and just throws ideas at each other. And then what I do is I work with them, the managers in the team to curate those ideas and say, okay, this is working, this is not working, and then go back to the team and say, Hey, based on everybody's inputs and ideas, this is what we are thinking of doing. So that's just the practice that we have.

Even besides that, I think the culture that we have built, at least I've tried to build in the team is that if there is, if I'm doing anything wrong, if they feel that there is something that that, you know, is not making sense for them, or for the work that they're doing, but it's coming, because you know, I laid down that strategy, they always come back and say, listen Nida, this is not working, you know, this does not make sense for the work that I do. My reaction to that is not well, we have to figure out a way of making this work, because nothing is set in stone. So my reaction to that is always, okay, you tell me, how do we make this work? You know, what are your ideas? What are you bringing to the table? And so that has developed like a culture of constantly

bouncing back ideas, because it's a safe space, and they know that they can call me out as well, and all the managers also know that in the team. And that's why we are constantly innovating, in terms of our strategies. The most fun we have is actually with social media, because, you know, there's just so much, that we can do. And the same thing also follows with like, every single person who we are supporting in, the Campaigns team is supporting, which means that, you know, the people like Almaz in the community, we don't tell them what needs to be done. It needs to come from them. And that's usually actually what has become now the culture of Change.org India.

So yeah, come to this segment, which is called the Try This At Work segment. In this segment, we ask our guests to give us one actionable thing that we should try out at work, which can help us take small steps toward change, and motivates us to keep working even in the absence of that one big idea. So, Nida, what's your one actionable thing that you would like to give to our listeners?

I would say definitely take out time to think about what you're doing. Just slot a time in your calendar. Trust me, it would not happen unless you put it on your calendar. So that you can you know that that is your time to connect with yourself and your purpose.

You know, usually we are so busy doing things that, you know, there are 100 things on our plate. And we're constantly doing things. But we often forget to figure out, why we're doing what we're doing. So having some time dedicated to just think, you know, that's your thinking time. It would end up making you way more efficient, and definitely less stressed. And another outcome of that is that I put down everything, all my thoughts. I actually write them down sometimes. But sometimes they just come out in the form of like, you know, my weekly priorities. So instead of making daily priorities, I make weekly priorities and sometimes two week priorities where I don't go down and say okay, this is what needs to be done today. I don't live in the today; I look at a 7 days or 15 days stretch and say okay, this is what I need to accomplish and what that thinking down time



does is, it allows me to look at, have I finished the priorities that I said set down like you know two weeks back? And if not then what? What has been taking my time? So, it's a great time management tool as well. And you feel less stressed because you've evaluated what is on your list, what needs your attention and what does not need your attention. That's always a good thing.

Thank you for listening to this episode featuring Nida Hasan of Change.org. As you heard, slow and steady truly is a winning formula, and taking small yet incremental steps can help you grow gradually. You can join the Vaahini Network, a networking forum for women professionals enabled by Accenture, to further enrich you with varied perspectives that it offers. The link to join is in the description of this episode. Also, don't forget to send in your feedback and your thoughts to us.

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