Changing the World One PPT at a Time

- by Arpitha Rao

I completed one year at Sattva Consulting recently on Jan 2nd. With the New Year kicking in and the mind slipping into its usual year-end reflections, like everybody else I asked myself what was my 2019 all about? Well, it was about *changing the world one PPT at a time.*

Consulting and PPTs are inseparable and as an impact consultant where your advisory should inevitably lead to tangible impact on the ground, it is all the more important to get those PPT skills right! My small team of members (myself, the firm's Principal and ever helpful Associates) took a journey to productize service offerings of a leading education foundation in the country. At the end of 9 months, we delivered (no pun intended) ~800 pages of 8 strategy decks that we co-created with the 50+ kindest and brightest educational and behavioral-change leaders in the client firm.

While these 8 PPT decks contain a blueprint for educational transformation in India, the consulting assignment taught me invaluable lessons in systemic thinking and leadership. The process involved understanding the education machinery across 10 Indian states deeply across domains of technology, legal, governance, people development, organization design, and systems. Sharing the 8 biggest lessons in 'changing the world' that I learned through building these 8 PPTs:

1. *It takes a tribe to change the world -* All the effective recipes for changing the world involve win-win partnerships among players irrespective of whether you are the government, for-profit or non-profit organization. The social problems we have to solve are complex in nature and they need the financial and distribution power of government, the technical know-how of business and the community knowledge of NGOs. If you are an aware and willing citizen who wants to contribute to positive change in the world then one has to find these successful partnerships or decode the success model by oneself to form one.

2. *Building a platform for ecosystem involvement is inevitable -* Scalable solutions to create large scale impact are made possible mainly through technology. If social solutions do not ride the wave of technology revolution then they might fade out in the light of talented human resource constraints and operational inefficiencies. To ensure partnerships thrive and succeed to implement the solutions, platforms with technology enablers should be in place.

3. *The solutions to changing the world are multi-pronged -* There's no silver bullet to changing the world. If any solution presents itself as the panacea for all social problems then that's the recipe to investor money wasted. Sustainable solutions to complex social problems involve mass mobilization of communities with relevant fixes to people, institutions and systemic problems all at once. The fixes can be found

through a careful combination of learning & development, institutional strengthening, and technology.

4. ***Population-level transformation needs patient capital -*** Sattva's [Everyday Giving report](#) informs that in 2017, 5.1B USD everyday contribution was given for religious and community causes. In spite of a strong philanthropic mindset in India, we don't have capital that nourishes innovation, experimentation, and patience in achieving impact in large scale projects of transformation. Large ticket philanthropic investors, corporates, grant-making organizations, and impact investors are engaging with social organizations for a shorter and shorter time period of investment. If social solutions, in turn, take a short term view for design then there's no one designing them to provide long term sustainability.

5. ***Return on time invested is crucial for success -*** With or without patient capital, the organizations (government, private, non-profit) should still continue to design transformative solutions that provide the highest return on time invested. This requires a keen focus on understanding and adopting best practices from adjacent solutions at the national and global scale. The solutions should provide a clear causal relationship with the intervention inputs and the expected outcomes.

6. ***Investing in people is the only way out to success -*** When organizations set out to create population-scale changes then they have to invest in building the capabilities (both technical and leadership) of their people at each point of the value chain. Personal, people and domain leadership of every player in the partnership is important in implementing the solution. They have to be continuously empowered with the right systems and tools to succeed. If we leave people behind, then the sustainability deserts the party!

7. ***Pilot success is not the end of the story -*** As much as proofs of concept are important to establish a narrative of the social solution on the ground, the pilots are just the beginning of the story of change. Without organized players eyeing the larger population impact, the successes of micro innovations might be limited to discussions in colleges and conferences. What succeeds in a smaller section of the population might not be effective at scale.

8. ***Ultimately its that 1 line on the budget -*** Commonly accepted global standards of impact measurement such as IMP, IRIS+ and the many other frameworks on one side while the ultimate acceptance of your solution by the government is one side. The inclusion of your solution component as a line item in the local or union government budget often provides divine powers to a social solution in the ecosystem. However, validation by the government authorities might still not qualify the socio-economic standards of your solution that only time and history can validate!

I had entered 2019 with a lot of hopes for my new job. With worrisome incidents across the country and the world making us question the basic structure of our society, I am grateful to have engaged with the social problems and solutions with the help of 150+ people at Sattva.

I would love to hear further thoughts from individuals and organizations who have dealt with social change for long through investments, programs, projects and technology! What does it take to change the world?

(This was originally published on LinkedIn)

Arpitha Rao is part of our Transformation Advisory team and is based in our Bangalore office. Her current work focuses on large-scale transformations in public education. Before Sattva, Arpitha has worked with Teach for India, the India Literacy Project, and Greatest Common Factor. She followed up her Engineering degree with a Masters from TISS and an MBA from ISB.

Sattva has been working with various non-profits and social organisations as well as corporate clients to help them define their social impact goals. Our focus is to solve critical problems and find scalable solutions. We assist organisations in formulating their long-term social impact strategy by strategically aligning with business to provide meaningful solutions to social issues.

We'd love to hear your thoughts and feedback on this topic. Do write to us: impact@sattva.co.in