Paolo Santana - "Problem-solving for the 99%"

These are the highlights of Paolo Santana's talk at the SingularityU South Africa 2020 Summit.

Paolo Santana.

Founder and CEO of Social Glass (a software ecosystem powering high-performing governments), Paolo Santana is a lawyer, public procurement expert and tech entrepreneur creating the world's next political system after democracy. She spoke at the SingularityU 2020 Online summit to address problem-solving for the 99,9%.

Demystifying the concept of moonshot ideas

Santana started by demystifying the concept of moonshot ideas, explaining that are these big ideas that allow us to grow with them, but they're often so big, we don't know how to tackle them. However, we do want to chase these ideas. Moonshots are born out of observing the existing reality and wanting to do better. This is the best way to identify an opportunity for change and improvement.

Starting with governments, the biggest decision-makers in the world. Santana believes that in 80% of the world, governments don't function as quickly or efficiently as we want to them to. They implement their decisions by making laws and allocating funds to projects. She explained that government procurement is a $12tn global industry that is outdated, fragmented, obsolete and implemented badly.

However, if we solve government procurement problems, we can solve a lot of other problems through a bottom-up approach. There are so many overlooked problems in procurements such as $3tn dollars of direct purchases made up of small amounts, that require no decision making or competition. In the USA, alone there are over 27 million businesses and less than 1% of them sell to government.

As a potential solution to this, Santana's company, Social Glass, has developed an online marketplace where governments can come and make a fully compliant purchase, with umpteen options of verified vendors to choose from. At the same time, this enables a small business to sell their products to governments. Called "Commerce", it is a seamless space for governments and vendors to connect and is entirely cloud-based. No training is needed and the company helps to simplify the admin legwork.

Opportunity to problem solve for the 99%

Another example of moonshot thinking is her first company "Matternet", that created the first drone delivery network in the world. Many people thought they were transporting pizza, explained Santana, however, they did not. Matternet was not started for the 1% of the world. It was started for the rest of the world that are disconnected from social and economic delivery because of where they are situated. Some cities are so congested that building more infrastructure doesn't help. Matternet has been working with Unicef since 2016 to transport antiretrovirals to certain remote places in Africa. Santana explained that it was only after this that the developed world started paying attention.

Santana explains that there is a tremendous opportunity to problem solve for the 99% and this innovation doesn't only happen in Silicon Valley. She believes that the opportunity is to look at the problems right in front of us, take ownership of them and find ways to solve them in the best way possible, saying that "disruption doesn't only come from technology. We need everyone from techies lawyers, designers & architects – all have a role to play in problem-solving".

Santana concluded with a few simple steps to moonshot thinking:

- Leverage exponentials. These are low hanging fruit. Don't wait. Start using them today
- Observe your existing reality. There are problems in front of you that are so massive and critical that they affect everybody. You can come up with a solution right where you are.
- Fail fast and fail often so you can reach a good first solution quickly enough. This is key to a disruption mindset and to future proof Africa.

Moonshot thinking can help us leapfrog solutions that can help all of us in the world today.

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