

# Platform thinking is not a pipe dream; what SA can learn from Google

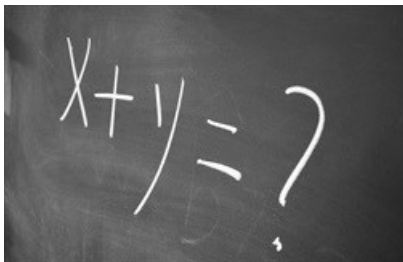
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Treat learners like platforms that can grow in intellectual potency to levels never imagined possible as opposed to pipes that are bounded by their very nature...

Widespread entrepreneurial innovation is a big driver for South Africa's success in growing the economy and creating jobs. "Increasing the number of researchers, enhancing research and innovation skills and outputs could contribute positively to improving South Africa's economy and job creation efforts", said Department of Science and Technology Minister, Naledi Pandor at the inaugural Innovation Bridge held at the CSIR.

This is as true as it gets and can only be achieved if concerted efforts are made to develop the creativity, risk-taking and resilience necessary for sustainable and innovative entrepreneurship. These attributes have to be ingrained in the learners from a very young age. Is the country doing enough to foster creativity and real-life problem-solving from an early age?



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The education system is not doing enough to equip learners with the necessary skills for them to flourish in entrepreneurial activities. One of the major problems is that the whole education ecosystem is based on a linear pipe system that does not encourage divergent growth of intellect and skills into the unknown. The proverbial "x" in the maths class should be that end-result or solution attained after learners transcend into an unknown world using known principles so as to fully traverse the terrain that is full of possibilities. Currently education policy makers have brought in platform ideas which are not fully appreciated by implementers who are deeply embedded in the

pipeline era.

Our world as we know it has always been governed by pipes created during the Industrial Age. Big conglomerates, systems analysts adopted the pipe thinking in their modus operandi thus have become part and parcel of our lives. Companies like Google, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft have demonstrated that new and better models exist in our fast changing environments.

Education is remaining stagnant as the world moves thus rendering it irrelevant in preparing the learners for meaningful contribution to the global economy. The above-mentioned companies have done away with the pipe-based system and have adopted the platform-based system.

According to Netscape Founder and Venture Capitalist Mark Andreessen, "A platform is a system that can be ... adapted to countless needs and niches that the platform's original developers could not possibly have contemplated."

Imagine the learners being the platforms and teachers and society being the developers. The developer endeavours to create a platform that can grow exponentially as a result of a robust base knowledge which allows for plugins, co-creation, third-party involvement and room for growth of the base knowledge. In the educational context, the learners ought to be able to scale their capabilities by fully manipulating the base knowledge. Different problems require different solutions thus learners should be able to develop plugin solutions in any given context.

The Department of Education and all other stakeholders have to seriously look at ways and means to give learners problem solving tools such that they will be able to scale their theoretical knowledge in real life scenarios. These are non-negotiable prerequisites for an innovative entrepreneurial culture in the country.

Mathematical problem solving frameworks combined with design and creative thinking in a hackathon-like setting is a great starting point as learners solve real problems and call on different faculties of their brain to get to the solution in a team setting.

There are many ways of fostering sustainable innovation in South Africa if everyone comes out of the pipe thinking and utilise strategies that have room for exponential growth of the learners' knowledge base which are more than just sufficient in tackling societal problems.

The technology companies offer an alternative model for seeing life that overturns and tramples the status quo of pipelines. Platform thinking is definitely not a pipe dream but a system of thinking that unlocks value for all players in the South African economy.

## ABOUT EDZAI CONILIAS ZVOBWO

Edzai is at TEDSF. Its mission is to contribute to poverty alleviation through improving employability and entrepreneurship in Africa through research, thought leadership, news, sustainable interventions and partnership activities

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