

Mission: Innovation – Key getaways and thoughts from the bootcamp

Between 14th to 17th September 2020, just a day before yet another lockdown, I had the pleasure of joining ‘Mission: Innovation’, a bootcamp tailored to the needs of Trade & Innovation Counsellors serving in EU Diplomatic Missions in Israel.

The bootcamp programme was jointly designed and delivered by the [European Institute of Innovation & Technology \(EIT\) Hub in Israel](#) and [Innovation Without Borders \(IWB\)](#), an organization serving as a platform for diplomatic staff leading innovation activities in Israel to network with local ecosystem stakeholders.

Considering that the [Cyprus Trade Center \(CTC\) in Tel Aviv](#) has been operating for 3 years already and that during this time has initiated, supported, and took part in several activities in the Research & Innovation domain, our team’s knowledge and understanding of the local ecosystem would be classified as fair.

Nevertheless, we abide by the motto ‘I know that I know nothing’ (ἐν οἶδα ὅτι οὐδὲν οἶδα). Thus, with an interest of enriching my knowledge, extending our office’s network and challenging my understanding of the opportunities and challenges in advancing cooperation between Cyprus and Israel, I joined a team of counterparts from 9 different EU diplomatic missions in this 4-day educational journey.

In summary, the bootcamp’s intense programme could be divided into 3 meta-categories.

- A plethora of back to back meetings with key ecosystem actors, covering the full stakeholder spectrum; academia, public sector, private sector as well as civil society.
- A specialist workshop guiding participants to clearly lay out their innovation agenda objectives, formulate a concrete action plan and pinpoint deliverables and performance metrics.
- Peer-to-peer learning, through daily interaction with counterparts sharing very similar job descriptions but practically delivering value for their respective business communities and countries in varied ways

Personal Key Getaways & Thoughts

- High-level objectives for EU innovation counsellors in Israel may look alike, but the actual opportunities and projects to be explored may vary significantly between countries when taking into account parameters such as -and not limited to- the specific country’s economic profile, its innovation strategy, availability of resources, national ecosystem size and maturity level, presence of MNCs, culture, intensity of collaboration between stakeholder groups etc.
- Projects & Activities Planning - Concerning delegation visits and other relevant events; sector-specific, more compact initiatives may deliver significantly greater value and tangible results compared to those of general -and often customary- nature.
- There is a very wide network of potential partners to team up with when executing projects and collaborators to consult when collecting information and when handling requests from organisations back home. There is a great deal of overlap, which can at times lead to unnecessary duplication of effort but may also bring about complementarity. It is important to be clear on

requirements before approaching stakeholders, in order to (a) be efficient in identifying the most appropriate and relevant collaborator and (b) be effective in achieving targets.

- From an Innovation Counsellor's perspective, defining Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or performance metrics in general is a very challenging task. Quantifying targets is particularly complex as many elements in the equation are outside a Counsellor's control. Nevertheless, it is a valuable exercise worth pursuing while tweaking the outcome as you go (Plan-Do-Check-Act). This is not necessarily done as part of an appraisal process. Instead, it should serve as a compass for a given team to navigate accurately towards its objectives.
- COVID-19 era considerations – In the absence of physical meetings and events, the world resorted to the increased utilisation of VC tools and the planning of webinars and digital conferences. It is a common observation that we have by now reached 'Zoom-fatigue'. Thus, -to the extent possible- it is important to identify innovative, fresh ideas for webinars and digital events, to attract and engage audiences, and offer them value adding experiences.
- Continuously improving website and social media content, by keeping up to date with digital tools and communication trends is key to effective audience education and engagement.
- Boosting interest in available opportunities is equally important as bursting bubbles and misconceptions. E.g. Motivate EU companies searching for solutions and new technologies to look into the Israeli market, whilst at the same time informing that investment organisations in Israel are inward looking, meaning they predominantly and purposely invest in Israeli startups and are not -in principle- looking into investments in foreign startups.
- Stay knowledge-thirsty, ask questions, say 'yes' to networking opportunities, keep a positive attitude, embrace local culture and traits, be open and collaborative. Do not see hutzpah as an enemy, make sure you turn it into your friend.

Overall, the bootcamp experience was highly beneficial and I would heartily recommend it to fellow Counsellors who might consider signing up for it in the future. It was a great opportunity to take a step back, re-assess our operational environment also considering the extraordinary circumstances we are faced with due to the COVID-19 pandemic, re-evaluate our objectives and revise action plans.

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