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# EXPLORATION, PRESERVATION AND A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

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*Knowing one's leadership style can help in promoting a culture of innovation*

When Jigme Singye Wangchuk, the former King of Bhutan, coined the term *Gross National Happiness* (GNH) before he abdicated the crown in favour of his son in 1972, he did so to enshrine a school of thought emphasising that “sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing”. While the rest of the world was copying the Western model of development – industrialisation, GDP growth, foreign direct investments etc. – Bhutan marched to the beat of its own drummer.

Few paid attention to the seemingly utopian and unrealistic approach then, but countless financial crises and geo-political turmoil in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has garnered GNH considerable mainstream attention. In 2011, the United Nations even passed a resolution to place “happiness” on the global development agenda.

So when author **Andrew Grant** went climbing the mountain to Bhutan's holiest temple *Paro Taktsang* (Tiger's Nest), he thought he was getting as far away from modern civilisation as he possibly could.

“We got to the top of the mountain and we met the holiest of the holy monks, and I thought, ‘Maybe we'll get pearls of wisdom or something we'd never heard before,’ said Grant. “As we entered the temple, the monk pulled out a mobile phone.”

## PRESERVATION V EXPLORATION

Grant told the story at the launch of his new book 'The Innovation Race: How to change a culture to change the game', highlighting the example of Bhutan as an example of the two ends of the innovation spectrum: preservation versus exploration.

"We've got this live case study of this country that is struggling with the fact that they need to maintain their traditions, which is the preservation side, and they also know that if they don't embrace modernity and explore out they'll end up in trouble," said Grant. "I'm excited to see Bhutan go: 'We need both. We are acutely aware of what would happen if we spend too much time being the monk, and if we introduce technology too soon too fast the people can't cope.' They're on to it and it'd be exciting to see them as they go."

Grant describes the best innovators as race car drivers who use the entire width of the track for maximum speed around the curves, but are at the same time mindful of not going off the road. According to Grant's Innovative Change Leader (iCLi) Profile, individuals can measure their natural bias to be creative or otherwise on four spectra:

- Freedom v Control
- Openness v Focus
- Group emphasis v Individual emphasis
- Flexibility v Stability

Those leaning towards Freedom/Openness/Group emphasis/Flexibility are naturally inclined to be explorers, while those on the side of Control/Focus/Individual emphasis/Stability are more likely to be preservers.

"We all have our biases," Grant explains. "You'll know when you go into a company meeting, you might be the person that says, 'Let's have these new ideas.' If you're working in a traditionally conservative industry such as insurance, you might be the person that's pulling them across to the exploration side."

"Between control and freedom, these styles work but the question is: As a leader, is it a conscious decision?"

"However, you need to be aware that the company that you work for or the country you live in may be more on the preservation side. A good race car driver also knows who's on the road, and who are on either side of him."

## LEADERS, KNOW THYSELF

Using former Apple chief Steve Jobs and Singapore's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew as examples, Grant highlighted both men's reputation as a controlling leader who got things done quickly and well. While stressing that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' style of leadership, Grant draws the line with North Korea.

"The difference between North Korea and Singapore/Apple is that the latter had a sense of purpose; it wasn't about the leader, it was about the people," Grant explains. "I think that's where the difference was. When I meet leaders in corporate jobs today, I ask myself: 'Are they doing this for their own ego? Or do they genuinely want to help people?' It's healthy control versus unhealthy control."

Ultimately, a leader needs to be cognisant of what his or her style is in order to change it, if necessary.

“Between control and freedom,” Grant elaborates, “these styles work but the question is: As a leader, is it a conscious decision? Was it a conscious decision for Steve Jobs to say, ‘I’m going to be very controlling’? Or was it just personality?”

He adds: “One of the dangers that the research shows is that when visionary leaders leave, and they were tracking down the control side, succession planning is quite low,” referring specifically to Steve Jobs. “Jobs was always the explorer even though he didn’t always allow others to do so.

“Tim Cook is the preserver. He’s trying to tighten processes and make things work better. Thing is, you need a Steve Jobs-Tim Cook relationship for a company to be successful. When one goes and the other one is left to run the company, things don’t work so well.”