

Strategy for breakfast?

Rana Kotan

'Culture eats strategy for breakfast.' This remark by Peter Drucker is quoted by people who see culture at the heart of all successful institutions. The values of the organization and the way employees collaborate and communicate with each other are all embedded in the internal culture. And they're hard to change. Strategy on the other hand, demands change. Moreover, the external environment in which the organization operates also plays a significant role. In Turkey, it's a pretty tough one at the moment. So how would the Sabanci Foundation's new strategy cope with these challenges?



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Alignment of strategy with the internal culture

In 2007, the Sabanci Foundation which until that point had been focused on traditional philanthropy – building schools and institutions, providing scholarships and supporting arts and culture – added a strategic element to its traditional philanthropy, tackling social issues through grantmaking.

Strategic philanthropy was a major change for a Turkish family foundation. Our work was dedicated to fighting discrimination against women, youth and people with disabilities and ensuring their equal participation in social life. The most important outcome of this approach was the empowerment of those who face the problem and know the solution better than anyone else. We focused our efforts on awareness-raising, developing models, empowerment of activists, supporting grassroots development and advocacy for policy change and implementation. We collaborated with different stakeholders, including European foundations, with whom we exchanged experiences in conferences and seminars, and issued publications on gender and disability.

At the same time, traditional philanthropy, which takes its roots from our core value of 'sharing',

continued, with our institutions, scholarships and awards, as well as our arts and culture programme, which makes arts and music widely accessible.

These two elements have largely worked independently of each other, but after nearly ten years of experimenting with two different work streams and approaches, our new overarching goal of 'creating long-lasting impact' has brought us to a point of connection and synergy. We decided to bring both teams together. We developed cross-cutting projects such as the short film competition which is essentially an art project, but aims to create awareness of social problems at the same time. We work with hybrid teams, which increases our motivation and impact. This new approach also creates an internal learning culture and improves the work climate.

The external environment

All this is taking place against a turbulent background. After the failed coup attempt last July, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency. Turkish society is increasingly polarized, and against a background of growing tension and financial instability, the president is attempting to concentrate greater power into his hands. Under the circumstances, where security is the number one priority, civic space is shrinking more than ever.

Implementing our strategy amid these realities . . .

We believe that during this extraordinary period, philanthropy becomes even more crucial and should embrace the role of creating a more equal country more than ever. At the Sabanci Foundation, our vision is to achieve a country where all people enjoy their rights equally. We see our main role as bringing people together and 'building bridges' across divides. We maintain our neutral but inclusive approach and try to build stronger ties with our partners. We are committed to cultivating civil society and taking an active role in addressing social issues.

With our new strategy, we will focus on embracing our core values of love for humanity, sharing, sincerity and pioneering to create long-lasting impact, while carefully monitoring the dynamics of the internal and external culture. I believe it is possible that strategy and culture sit down to breakfast together. It looks hard, but a well-known Turkish writer and poet, Sait Faik Abasiyanik has the recipe: 'Beauty will save the world, everything starts with loving the human being.' @

SABANCI FOUNDATION AT A GLANCE

Founded In 1974 by the Sabanci family, which is also the founder of Sabanci Group, one of Turkey's leading conglomerates

Mission To contribute to education, culture and social development and make a difference in the lives of individuals

Annual expenditure €23 million (2016)

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