

## Reflection 11. Gain Exposure

As finance professionals we are all a product of our experience. As a consultant this makes up a huge component of my value proposition. I've been exposed to over 25 markets, and institutions of all types, commercial banks, SACCOs, microfinance institutions, community banks, fintechs, regulators, policy makers, donors, thematic NGOs and more. I've seen similar products excel in one market and fail completely in another. I've seen potential solutions already working. This level of exposure informs this entire series of blogs and all my consulting work.

Exposure is extremely important for senior management, exposure to best practices, different practices, to regional markets and to different groups of actual and potential customers. Exposure provides senior management with a benchmark or a baseline against which to measure themselves.

Exposure provides a manager with a critical sense of the difference between a principle and a practice. A principle always applies, a practice applies in a specific context. This appreciation is key in determining what makes a product or service successful, and therefore, understanding how to replicate or improve on an existing product or service in a market. Without exposure, we risk making the same mistakes as others in implementing our new services.

So how does a management team gain exposure, from my experience there are several ways:

1. A traditional exposure programme or visit: This can be important if a strategic decision is required. A team from First Bank Nigeria visited Kenya to study how agent banking was working before launching agent banking in Nigeria. A project team from Malawi visited Kenya to see Agtech and Agfin initiatives to gain ideas for the design of a new phase of their project. The trick in exposure programmes is to carefully specify the exposure you need, and to have someone with extensive experience in that subject or market to put the exposure programme together with you.
2. Networking across professional groups: Issue based networking is common, payment associations, bankers' associations, microfinance associations. These professional groups, if well used can provide exposure within your market.
3. Hiring in: External hiring is a way which providers can gain experienced staff, the challenge with this approach, is that often this comparative experience is either poorly applied, or not applied in the new institution, which already has its own processes, procedures, and products. It usually takes deliberate effort to benefit from the experience of new staff hires.
4. Participating in industry initiatives: A way to be on the ground floor of any new developments in a banking sector is to participate in industry initiatives for example in Kenya on developing the climate risk management framework with a team of other bankers.
5. Applied training: Training which is facilitated, and which is then used in practice or applied in coordination with the external facilitator.

6. Research and development: Many providers under invest in building their own capacity for R&D, learning directly from customers is important in product development and refinement.
7. Partnerships: Partnerships are becoming more strategic, particularly with vendors and service providers.
8. Webinars: Webinars are announced regularly and can be a good way to keep up to date. Contracted webinars can also be a cost-effective way of providing exposure to an entire senior management team.
9. Mentoring: Mentoring through a process where the management team is provided access to senior resources to discuss the service providers situation. This can be occasional, such as external speakers attending board meetings, or it can be a planned executive development programme.

Where is exposure most important?

From my experience, I've seen exposure work across three areas:

1. Strategic Direction: Where a new strategic direction is being considered, as in the case of First Bank Nigeria investigating agent banking.
2. Innovation: Where new innovations, or technologies, are anticipated either in products or services, or in ways we work. This is to provide ideas on how innovations might be applied in the institutions own market.
3. Market introductions: Where a financial service provider is entering a new market. This is usually to understand how the market works, to meet key decision makers, create critical contacts for the future.

The best exposure is deliberate and designed for a purpose, to inform decisions, to build teams and critical capacity.

First Principles Consulting can guide you through building exposure programmes to the Kenyan market, or through building webinar or mentorship programmes for your executive team. We can also share our experiences presentations to Boards of Directors, or through focused research to inform your decisions.

*If this reflection speaks to you... speak to me so that we can inspire change, together.*

David Cracknell

Additional reflections in this series can be downloaded from [www.firstprinciplesinfinance.com](http://www.firstprinciplesinfinance.com)