

HLG-MOS Sprint Session:
Innovative organisations: Strategies to stay relevant

(Geneva, Switzerland, 21 November 2017)

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE SPRINT SESSION

1. The HLG-MOS Sprint Session: Innovative organisations: Strategies to stay relevant was held in Geneva, Switzerland on 21 November 2017. It was attended by participants from Canada, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Republic of Korea, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat.
2. Mr. Pádraig Dalton, Director General of the Central Statistics Office, Ireland, opened the Sprint Session. He highlighted that the nature of change for statistical organisations is different from before, and this is challenging. The changes are not taking place in areas where statistical organisations traditionally have the skill sets. Without strong leadership, innovation will not take place.
3. Before the Sprint Session, Chief Statisticians were invited to put forward their top three modernisation priorities. From this input, five themes emerged:
 - Resilience in transformation – A big challenge for statistical organisations is to change the culture, create an appetite for risk around innovation and mobilise staff at all levels. It is important to embed innovation in the culture by empowering middle management and giving staff the assurance that they take risks.
 - Communicating – Traditionally, statistical organisations have not branded what they are and have to offer. Statistical organisations need to be proactive and increase their visibility. They have a role as provider of evidence for policy makers, and a role to provide evidence for citizens to hold decision makers accountable. There is a need to develop products that transform data and statistics into insightful information.
 - Accessing and using new data sources - Using new data sources is a big challenge but not necessarily a new challenge. We have to know how to add value and tell stories that answer the questions that people want to know.
 - Standards - The statistical standards are very important. GSBPM is embedded in many statistical organisations.

- Technology - Technology is critical to business operations and it is important to be aware of the challenges and opportunities it poses.

4. The Sprint Session discussed what statistical organisations should innovate, how to innovate and the role of the Chief Statistician. The following sections summarise the main points of the discussions.

What do we innovate?

5. Statistical organisations need to innovate to both prepare for change and to make change. It was recognised that there has been a shift in focus for statistical organisations. Although process is still important, we now also need to focus on:

- Innovation in communication,
- Innovation in products, and
- Innovation in the services we offer.

6. It is not yet clear what services official statistics should be providing in the future. Some examples of services include data integration, data linking, bespoke analysis for policymakers, predictive services, and citizen focused communications. There are some services that statistical organisations are uniquely positioned to provide. It is important to have clarity on the role of the statistical organisations in order to decide where to invest over the next few years.

7. Statistical organisations have a big role in providing data to society and unleashing the power of statistics. The question is how they can increase their impact on society. One approach is to do small-scale pilot tests of new products and services, and then get feedback from stakeholders on their value. Successful innovations can be scaled up. Statistical organisations can also think of scaling across (learning from each other) and scaling out (to other industries and ecosystems).

How do we innovate?

8. Innovation requires an environment where people with different interests and backgrounds can come together and share their ideas.

9. Innovation is, however, a broader concept than partnerships. Innovation is not only technical innovation, it can also be organisational if it changes the way of working. There are two types of innovation: a culture of innovation, where innovation flows freely and there is a method of processing innovations; the other is having a separate cell or unit for innovation.

10. The presentations and discussions noted five points to consider when creating an innovative environment:

- Ambitious goals – It is important to set challenging targets to achieve.
- Focus and choose – It is important to have a focused innovation strategy

- Partnerships are key – Statistical organisations are not alone in change; it is useful to be open and engage with partners.
- Innovations have to add value – Statistical organisations should consider carefully the needs for innovation and the value the work will bring to the organisation. Adding value is more than just monetary value.
- Outlets for innovation – Having a way to promote, make innovations visible and receive feedback on them is helpful (for example innovation websites).

What is the role of the Chief Statistician?

11. Developing an environment open to innovation includes everything from recruiting the right people and building diverse teams to promoting a culture that cultivates creativity and is not afraid of failure.

12. There is a need for Chief Statisticians to become aware of mechanism used in innovative organisations. For example, what does agile really mean and how to take an agile approach to innovation.

13. It can be a challenge to balance different types of innovation – bottom up vs top down, innovation from business areas vs corporate innovations. Statistical organisations should create an environment to get insights on key issues that affect all who are trying to innovate.

14. When statistical organisations have innovation processes, the organisation should set a risk appetite for innovation. This involve shifting the culture for investment and failure. Staff should not be afraid to make mistakes. The way the Chief Statistician reacts to failure really sets the tone for the organisation.

15. Leaders should have vision (otherwise the organisation does not move) and values. The Chief Statistician should lead the strategy, not necessarily define the strategy. Strategy should be something that is created with the team.

16. The Chief Statistician is there to help staff do what needs to be done. There is no standard role. They play different roles depending on the situation. Three examples of these roles are transactional, innovator and disruptor. It is important to remember that positive sustainable change can take time. The Chief Statistician has to take a long-term view and think about the position of the organisation in the future.

Next Steps

17. Statistical organisations need to keep finding opportunities to maintain their relevance. Losing relevance is a big risk, as is losing the trust of stakeholders that the organisation will respond to demands. There are many opportunities related to data services. Organisations should be proactive, not passive, in responding to these opportunities. It is important not only to think of statistics, but also data and services. Statistical organisations cannot stay in a narrow technical world.

18. It is necessary for statistical organisations to recognise the need to innovate, and to recognise their competitive advantage. Statistical organisations have a unique position in society, but are not good at marketing what they do. It is important to build a brand, and to sell the strengths of the organisations.

19. Finally, statistical organisations need to innovate together and with other partners. The role of international cooperation should be clear. Sharing experiences and identifying areas where collaboration can deliver benefits is critical.

20. The Modernisation Community needs to define their five-year vision. The discussions and conclusions of the sprint session will provide input into the revision of the HLG-MOS strategy during 2018. This vision should be stress tested to ensure it will assist statistical organisations to remain relevant.

Further information

21. All documents and presentations for the meeting are available on the website of the UNECE Statistical Division (<https://statswiki.unece.org/x/fQJsCQ>).