



## A story of building innovation in Local Government: A Trinbagonian derivative of the Triple Helix



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The continuous inflow of research findings, knowledge and innovation into firms has become a critical ingredient for the survivability and competitiveness of firms globally. As we continue further into the knowledge era and the 4th industrial revolution, it has become ever so clear that the outputs of research institutions, such as Universities and the like, can add significant value to the competitiveness of firms in this fast-paced post modernistic world. But the need for the continuous inflow of knowledge and innovation should not only be limited to the competing firms but should also be an intrinsic part of the governance of nations.

Today, most governments strive to

become more competitive by improving conditions that support the well-being of the population and businesses within its borders. This is especially more significant in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as governments' activities within these small nations are usually the drivers of the economy. This makes it even more imperative for Small Island Developing States of the Caribbean to seek a system that would enable a continuous inflow of knowledge and innovation at all levels of governance.

In 2013, with my family's blessings, I ran for local government elections within the Royal Chartered Borough of Arima, Trinidad. Being a Doctoral Candidate I believed that my education, knowledge and

research abilities would have been able to contribute to the development of the Town and the country at large.

After our inauguration, I was selected by the past Mayor to become the Chairman of the Physical Infrastructure Committee with the responsibility of overseeing the Council's strategy for constructional and other infrastructural development of the Eastern Borough. This position required me to work closely with the CEO and Works department to find innovative ways to execute projects efficiently and effectively. Though cliché words of management, in this instance, they remain critical measures, as "efficient" and "effective" delivery of goods and services require constant reviews of

**“ It is also interesting to note that in 2011 Trinidad and Tobago saw an increase of the number of women on state boards as high as 31%. ”**



Fig 1: Diagram Showing the Triple Helix Framework  
 -The above diagram shows the creation of a Triple helix innovation ecosystem where information and knowledge is passed from one entity to another. At the centre of the diagram is the Interaction Monitoring and Feedback Board (a coordinating council).

ideas, processes and organisational culture in order to reduce cost and enhance the quality of deliverables.

Within an environment of limited funds, the first approach taken to achieve this was to fully utilise resident knowledge and competencies to improve departmental functions. We engaged the staff and incentivised them to contribute to the improvement of their performance through the implementation of their ideas. Though improvement did take place, there was still a need to further improve the functions and resultant outputs of the department beyond what the resident capacity could have provided.

The second approach to bring new knowledge into the Corporation was via the use of a consultant. To do this, we undertook the painstaking process of defining the scope of works for a contract, based on our analysis of specific problems. After the engagement of the consultant, it was soon realised that the defined scope of works simultaneously restricted the intervention to a specific time bound task and would not provide the holistic and continuous flow of innovation that was urgently required. There was a need for the employment of a self-perpetuating system that consistently provided the knowledge that would have catalysed innovation within the corporation. This innovation would in turn enable the continuous enhancement of processes and output that not only would provide efficiency

and effectiveness but also enable the corporation to operate in a manner that was consistent with global trends.

Through research, the discovery of the Triple Helix concept was viewed as a possible blueprint that can bridge the knowledge and innovation gap between Local Government, the Corporation and the University. Developed by the Stanford University Professor, Henry Etzkowitz, "The Triple Helix" (Etzkowitz 2008) is a concept that creates an ecosystem that enables the continuous flow of knowledge and innovation to catalyze the improvement of performance of all involved entities.

Within this framework the roles are as follows:

- The University (UWI, UTT, Lok Jack GSB) – the centre for idea development, research and knowledge creation
- The Corporation (City, Borough, Regional) – the site for the application of knowledge and theories for the development of a local innovation
- The Government – (central and local) – where legislation and policies are made to create the triadic ecosystem

It should be noted that the impact of the triple helix concept has grown significantly over the last two decades and has been used as a blueprint for the exploration and development of home-grown innovation globally. Success of its application can be

seen in: Thailand's Poultry Agribusiness, Brazil's SME Development- Incubadora and California, USA- Silicon Valley.

Within the Local Government context of Trinidad and Tobago, a derivative of the framework was conceptualised to ensure that the system remains synchronised with local and national development plans. To accomplish this, a coordinating council was added to oversee the interaction of the three entities whilst acting as a two-way conduit for the thrust and feedback on government's philosophies and strategies. This additional department, the Interaction, Monitoring and Feedback Board would consist of persons with expertise in multiple disciplines from each involved entity and will be placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Government. This concept has been presented to the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development and is currently under review.

If this system is adopted, it would provide a platform for the continuous development of local and, national innovation as knowledge (versus information) will now become an intrinsic part of the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. It should be noted that the use of locally generated innovation will not only aid in finding more efficient and relevant ways to preserve resources and deliver output, but it would also simultaneously provide more researched data and knowledge for future national and local development.