

# Global Innovation – the importance of Interdependence

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## **Background**

Traditionally, black tea has been a commodity product with competitive advantage derived through the buying, blending and packaging of teas from different origins with few proprietary benefits. Unilever Tea East Africa, in conjunction with Unilever R&D in UK, USA and India has developed novel tea manufacturing processes which deliver innovative tea products offering new consumer benefits. The first of these unique teas to reach the market was ***Lipton Cold Brew*** a cold infusing tea bag, launched during 1999 in the USA. It was the first leaf tea innovation in the USA since 1942.

## **Consumer Insight**

80% of leaf tea sold in the US is consumed as iced tea, traditionally brewed by steeping tea leaves or tea bags for many hours in cold water or by waiting for a brew prepared with boiling water to cool in the refrigerator. The consumer saw the only alternative, instant powder, as a significant compromise on quality. Market research demonstrated that consumers desired real tea leaves, in a tea bag which could deliver quality iced tea within minutes.

## **Research & development**

Many years of basic research into the biochemistry of tea at Unilever R&D facilities in UK, India and Kenya combined with access to in-house tea estates and processing equipment in East Africa has led to the realisation of a unique consumer proposition. ***Iced tea from real tea leaves, in a tea bag which brews in 5°C water within five minutes***. Development has continued since the original launch and with the introduction of new tea harvesting techniques, liquor performance at lower water temperatures has significantly improved.

## **Growing and Manufacturing**

World Class tea growing, manufacturing and project management skills enabled fast scale up of the new technology utilising mini manufacture and pilot plant facilities in Kenya. New capabilities were developed in the areas of microbiologically hygienic processing and Food Quality Assurance, which are unparalleled in the tea industry. Latterly, technology transfer skills have been crucial in the roll out of the patented manufacturing process to a second factory in Argentina

## **Interdependence**

The development of ***Lipton Cold Brew*** was made possible through the unique combination, within Unilever, of tea biochemistry understanding, excellent consumer insight, world class tea manufacturing and project management skills. Timescales were immensely challenging with financial risks shared between the various business units. Multinational team working across four business groups, and four continents has been crucial for creative idea generation and problem solving.