

Last week Friday, at the [Intel Inter-university App Challenge](#), [Dr. Bitange Ndemo](#) went on record as having challenged the young software developers assembled at the University of Nairobi's computer lab to consider the "multidisciplinary approach to app development" ; this is if the apps have to solve real world problems, not only more efficiently but also satisfactorily.

Crucially, Dr. Ndemo must have captured rather precisely what the authors of the [Start-up Nation : The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle](#), have penned as one among the most valuable secrets of Israel's success in innovation, technological or otherwise.

In a chapter of the book titled " From Nose Cones to Geysers", [Dan Senor](#) and [Saul Singer](#) (2009) describe "something different about Israel". Having interviewed Doug Wood, whom the book presents as former vice president of feature animation development and production at Turner, Warner Brothers, and Universal (currently the successful director of Animation Lab in Israel) , he is quoted by the authors to have remarked: "There's a multitask mentality here... there was this time I was working on a creative project with an art graduate...suddenly, a technological problem erupted. I was ready to call the techies in to fix it. But the ... student dropped his graphic work and began solving the problem like he was a trained engineer."

Doug Wood continued: "I asked him where he learned to do this. It turns out he was also a fighter pilot in the air force. This *art student? A fighter pilot?* It's like all these worlds come colliding here- or collaborating- depending on how you look at it."

Building on Wood's revelation, Senor and Singer note: " It's not surprising that multitasking, like many other advantages Israeli technologists seem to have, is fostered by the IDF [Israel Defense Forces]."

Then the authors bring Wood to the fore again: "This is great because conventional Hollywood studios say you need a 'projection manager' and you need a 'production coordinator' or you need a 'layout head.' But in Israel the titles are kind of arbitrary, really, because they are interchangeable in some ways and people do work on more than one thing."

Senor and Singer then reach a point they have to define what their source had described: " The term ... for this kind of crossover is a *mashup*.... An even more powerful mashup, in our view, is when innovation is born from the combination of radically different technologies and disciplines."

Illustratively, continue the authors, "The companies where mashups are most common in Israel are in the medical-device and biotech sectors, where you find wind tunnel engineers and doctors collaborating on a credit-sized device that may make injections obsolete. Or you find a company that has created an implantable artificial pancreas to treat diabetes."

Moreover, "There's a start-up that's built around around a pill that can transmit images from inside your intestines using optics technology taken from a missile's nose cone."

Eventually, after taking the reader through more case studies of the successful Israeli technological mashups, Senor and his colleague could only but conclude: "The Israeli penchant for technological mashups is more than a curiosity; it's a cultural mark that lies at the heart of what makes Israel so innovative. It is a product of the multidisciplinary backgrounds that Israelis often obtain by combining their military and civilian experiences."

“But it is also a way of thinking that produces particularly creative solutions and potentially opens up new industries and ‘disruptive’ advances in technology. It is a form of [beneficial] free thinking...,” assert the authors as they end the book’s chapter 12.

### **Reference**

Saul, S., and Senor, D. (2009). *Start-up Nation: The Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle*. Twelve Hachette Book Group: New York.