The Role of Innovation Labs in Transforming Public Services

25th – 27th May 2025

Bridgetown, Barbados

01

A 3-minute innovation masterclass

What is innovation?

"**Ideas** that are **implemented** and deliver **value**"

Adapted from ISO 56000 series of Guidance for Innovation Management

How is it different from…?

Transformation. process by which one function in converted into another one of similar value

Unlike innovation: it is changing something that is already there & that change may or may not add value

Reform. the amendment of something that is defective

Unlike innovation: it is changing something that is already there & that change may or may not be innovative

Continuous Improvement. recurring activity to enhance performance

Unlike innovation: it is rarely new or significantly improved

The innovation imperative

Because we are on the Frontlines of Global Shocks
"Climate, pandemics, geopolitics — we feel the tremors first and hardest."

Because Complex Problems are Outpacing Old Solutions
"We're using 20th-century systems to solve 21st-century challenges."

Because Citizens Expect More — and Better
"Public services are now judged against Amazon, not just the office next door."

Because Public Servants are Hungry for Purpose and Possibility
"There's talent and drive already inside the system — innovation unlocks it."

Because we have Unique Opportunities to Leapfrog
"Small systems can move faster — if we choose to."

Because we need to Shift from Control to Learning
"Public services are too often built to avoid mistakes, not to learn from them."

Because Technology isn't Stopping
"In small island states, digital isn't just an upgrade — it's our greatest lever for scale, service and survival."

What is an innovation lab?

"Innovation labs are teams created to foster innovation by using new methods, tools & approaches to solve complex public problems"
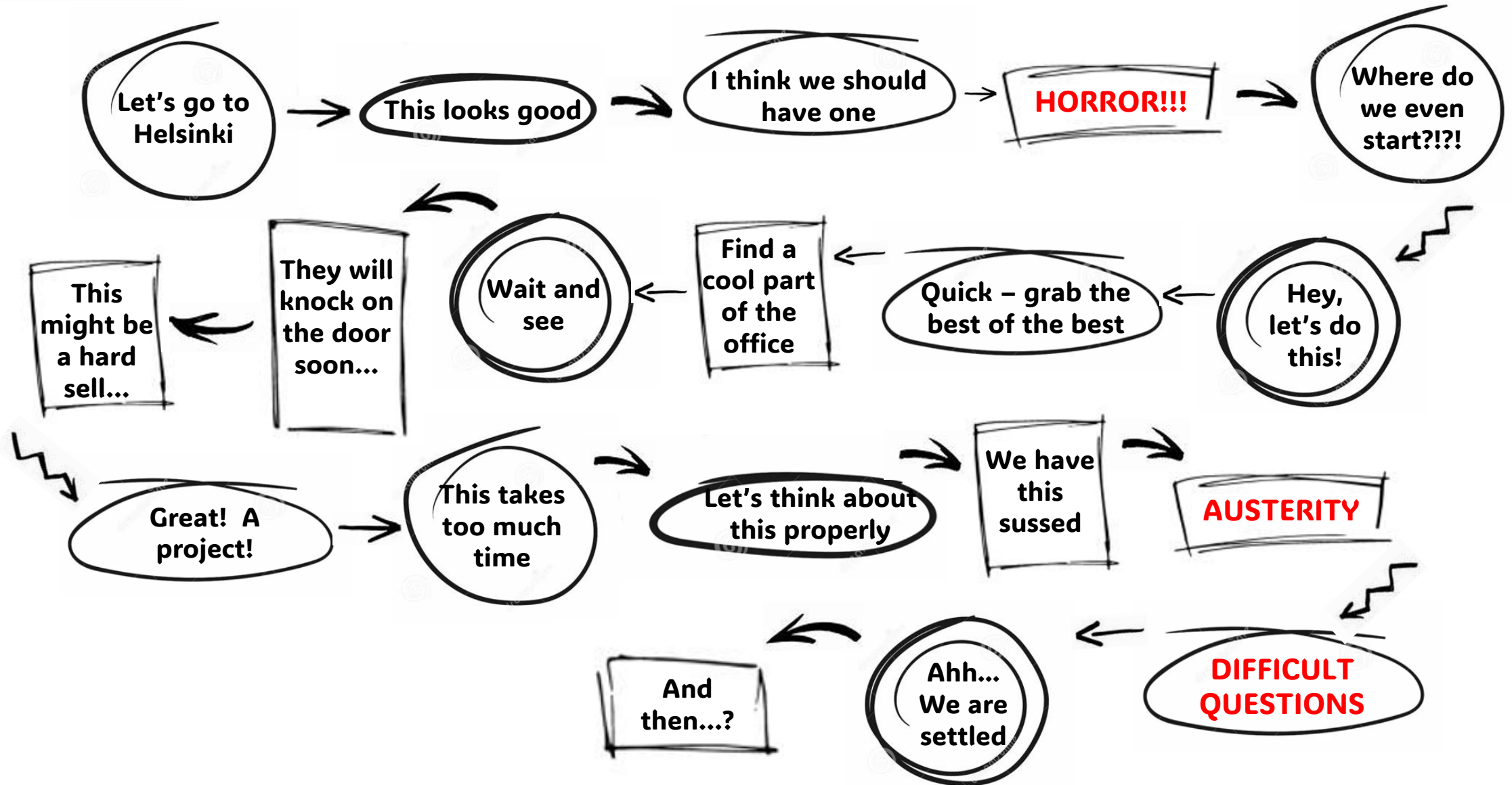
Adapted from OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI)

02

Getting started

Prepare yourself. This will be a journey.

Design for success. Or repent at your leisure.

- **Start with purpose…**

  …but be realistic about what you can achieve

- **It's all about you…**

  …design for your context

- **Have a clear value proposition…**

  …because "innovation" isn't enough
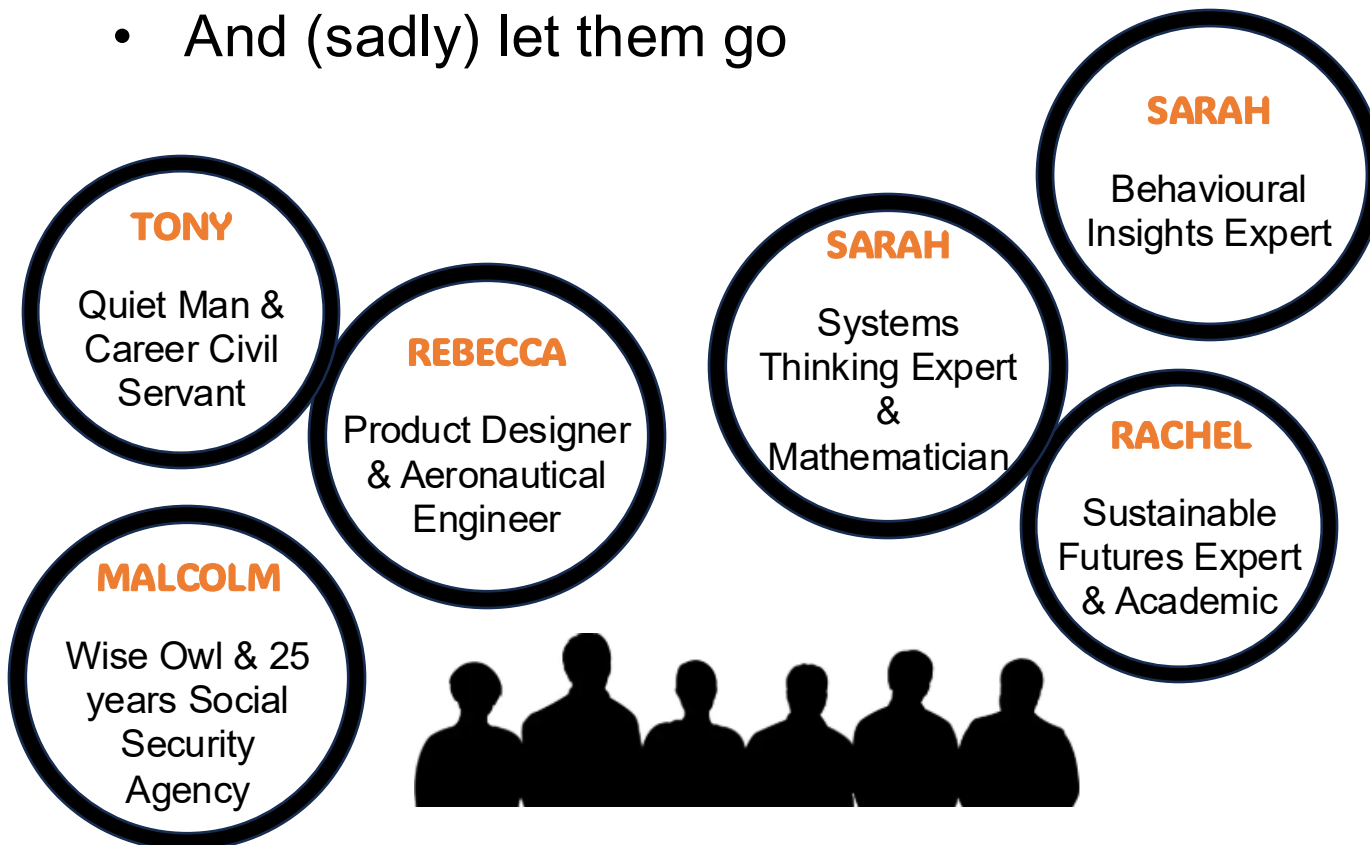
- **Build relationships before you need them…**

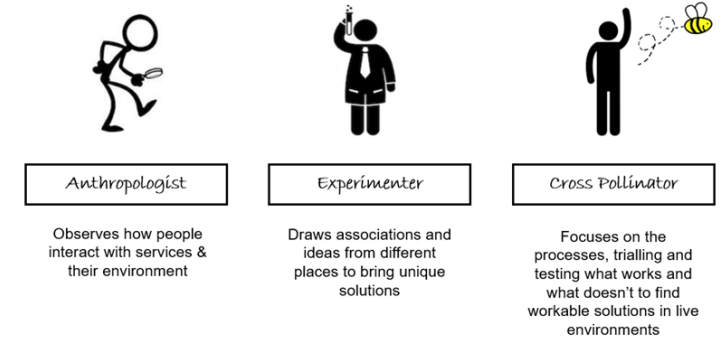 …focus on long-term trust, not short-term wow

- **Communicate…**

  …if you don't tell your story, someone else will write it for you
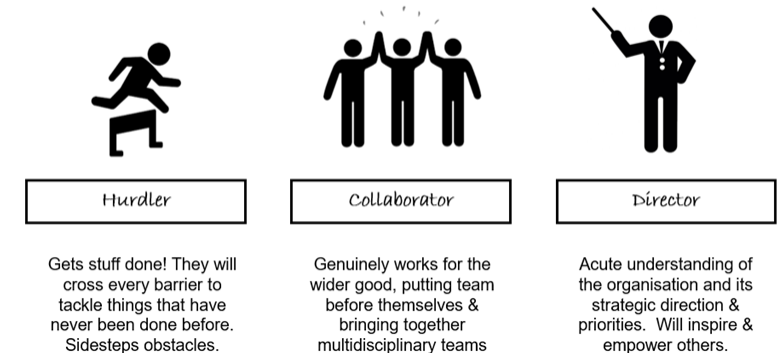
Find the right people.

- It's not just the "creative types"

- Represent the Ten Faces of Innovation ([The Ten Faces of Innovation – IDEO](#))
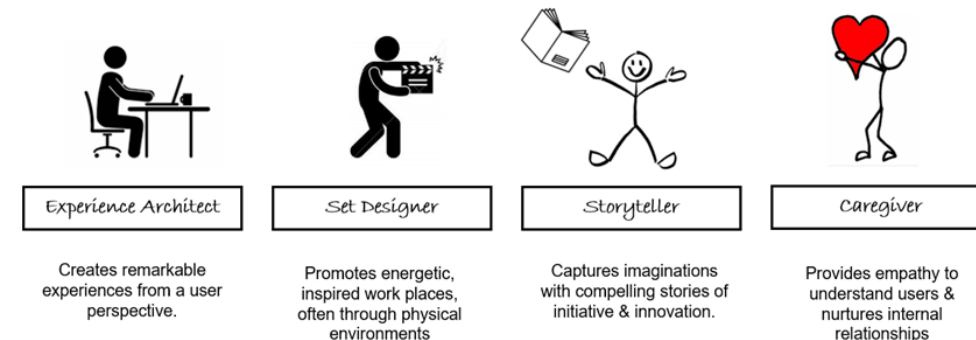
- And (sadly) let them go

TONY
Quiet Man & Career Civil Servant

REBECCA
Product Designer & Aeronautical Engineer

MALCOLM
Wise Owl & 25 years Social Security Agency

SARAH
Systems Thinking Expert & Mathematician

SARAH
Behavioural Insights Expert

RACHEL
Sustainable Futures Expert & Academic

The Learning Personas

Anthropologist
Observes how people interact with services & their environment

Experimenter
Draws associations and ideas from different places to bring unique solutions

Cross Pollinator
Focuses on the processes, trialling and testing what works and what doesn't to find workable solutions in live environments

The Organising Personas

Hurdler
Gets stuff done! They will cross every barrier to tackle things that have never been done before. Sidesteps obstacles.

Collaborator
Genuinely works for the wider good, putting team before themselves & bringing together multidisciplinary teams

Director
Acute understanding of the organisation and its strategic direction & priorities. Will inspire & empower others.

The Building Personas

Experience Architect
Creates remarkable experiences from a user perspective.

Set Designer
Promotes energetic, inspired work places, often through physical environments

Storyteller
Captures imaginations with compelling stories of initiative & innovation.

Caregiver
Provides empathy to understand users & nurtures internal relationships

03

Now the hard work begins

Manage expectations.

your own & *everyone else's*

your own

Expectation #1
Build it and they will come

Expectation #2
We must deliver. Urgently.

Expectation #3
We generated great ideas, surely someone will run with it

Expectation #4
Doing good work keeps us safe

Expectation #5
It's our job to shake things up

everyone else's

Expectation #1
"Those people over there" do innovation – we don't need to worry about it

Expectation #2
They will come up with all these ideas and we will end up having to deliver it

Expectation #3
Innovation labs will magically leapfrog the barriers to getting things done

Expectation #4
It will just be sticky notes

No Leader. No Lab.

- **Success starts and ends with leadership…**

  …be bold, think differently, act collaboratively and stay the course

- **Lead, don't manage…**

  …support, facilitate, champion

- **But be firm when you need to…**

  …but only when you really need to be

- **Read the (Political and political) room…**

  …context is everything and innovation is not neutral

- **Drive implementation…**

  …remember that innovation is value creation

Measure impact. Failure to do so will be your demise.
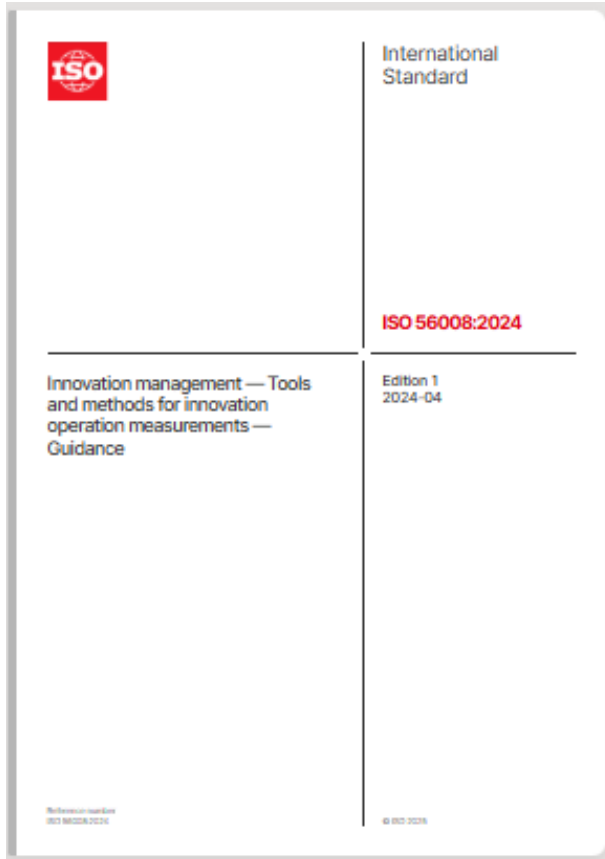
> " …organizations [[need]] to be able to measure the value created by their innovation operations, their results and outcomes for themselves and their interested parties, while helping to determine the impacts (positive/negative, intended/unintended) they can have on the economy, society, and the environment "

ISO 56008:2024 Innovation management — Tools and methods for innovation operation measurements — Guidance

International Standard

ISO 56008:2024

Innovation management — Tools and methods for innovation operation measurements — Guidance

Edition 1
2024-04

"The advantages of the Lab are more qualitative than quantitative. I couldn't put a value on it."
Project Sponsor, Department for Communities

04

Final reflections

Luxury or Essential Item?

Now back to the Northern Ireland Innovation Lab…

" Not every end of a lab means failure, some might transform into new units or leave institutional and cultural legacies as planned, while others might evolve in specialised innovation and tech units. "

Kumpf & Monteiro, The Devious Dozen: 12 fallacies behind innovation lab "failures", OECD OPSI, May 2024

Essential Item!!

A £27m Change Fund realised £43m savings over 15 reform projects in 1 year

Increased medicines optimisation resulted in £1.2m annualised savings and better patient outcomes

A model for taking decisions on dementia care with estimated £100m annualised savings

A 33% increase in the uptake of State benefits among eligible citizens

Increased waste recycling in 17,000 households contributing to meeting EU waste recycling targets