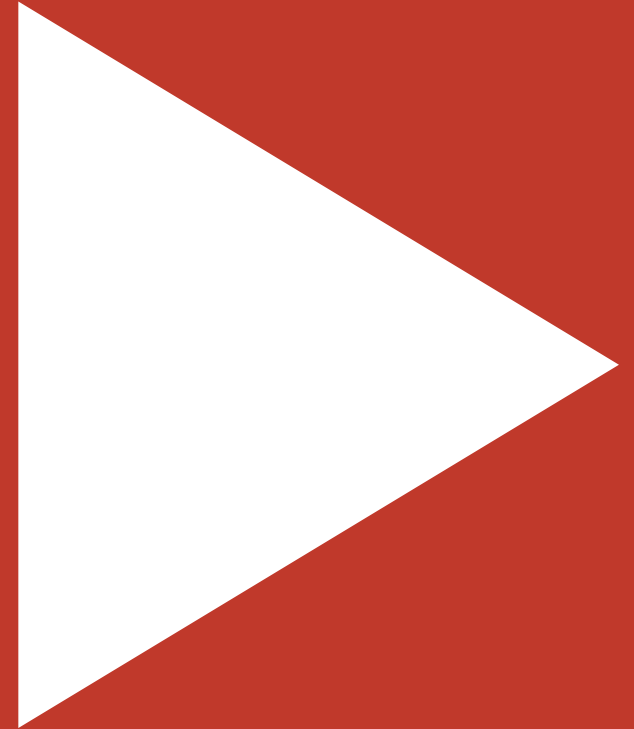THE
SOCIAL LABS FIELDBOOK
A practical guide to next-generation social labs

Version 1.0 Draft | January 2015

Zaid Hassan
with contributions from Mia Eisenstadt & Menka Sanghvi

Licensing & Acknowledgements

RELEASE NOTE

[5 January 2015]
Version 1.0 Draft Pre-release version of the Fieldbook Section 1, Introduction and Core Concepts released.

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CORE CONCEPTS

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All concepts are
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ⓒⓘ

There are no cheap tickets to mastery. You have to work at it, whether that means rigorously analyzing a system or rigorously casting off your own paradigms and throwing yourself into the humility of Not Knowing. In the end, it seems that power has less to do with pushing leverage points than it does with strategically, profoundly, madly letting go.

- Donella Meadows

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0/ Introduction

0.1/ What are Social Labs

"We have scientific and technical labs for solving our most difficult scientific and technical challenges. We need social labs to solve our most pressing social challenges." - Zaid Hassan

The Social Labs Fieldbook is a "how-to" guide for anyone wanting to set-up a social lab. A social lab is a strategic response to a complex social challenge.

The core concept of social labs, the "why-to" of social labs is covered in a companion book, "The Social Labs Revolution: A new approach to solving our most complex challenges." by Zaid Hassan (Berret-Koehler 2014)

So what are social labs?

Let me answer with another question. What is a medical laboratory? What, for example, is the David H. Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research at MIT? It's a medical research institute, or what we could think of as a lab, but what else is it? Here are some descriptions from their website:

"The David H. Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research at MIT is the epicenter of a highly collaborative effort to fight cancer in ways it has never been fought..."

"The Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research, a National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated Cancer Center, is a state-of-the-art cancer research facility as well as the hub of cancer research on the MIT campus."
and

"The Koch Institute brings together biologists and chemists along with biological, chemical, mechanical, and materials science engineers, computer scientists, clinicians and others, to bring fresh perspectives and an interdisciplinary approach to advancing the fight against cancer. This multi-faceted group of investigators is at the core of the Koch Institute's mission to develop new insights into cancer, as well as new tools and technologies to better treat, diagnose and prevent the disease."

So the Koch Institute is:

- a laboratory
- a space for multi-disciplinary collaboration
- a new strategy for combatting cancer

and inside this space a practice, a way of doing science, of fighting cancer, is undertaken.

Similar a social lab can be thought of as:

- a laboratory
- a space for multi-disciplinary collaboration
- a strategy for addressing a complex challenge

and within the space of a social laboratory, a practice, a way of addressing complex challenges, is undertaken.

This Fieldbook describes that practice.

Social labs are not tools. Inside social labs a variety of tools are used and deployed but using a social lab as a tool represents a misunderstanding of the nature of a laboratory.

If you wanted to get a little metaphysical, then social labs are part of a paradigm, a paradigm of experimentation as a way of understanding the world.

If you like, it is a paradigm of experimentation, of how to address our most complex challenges. It is an alternative paradigm to the strategic planning paradigm that's dominant today. "Social labs" therefore represent one form this paradigm can take.

The Sustainable Food Lab stands out as the first large-scale, multi-stakeholder social lab experiment. Organized in 2004, the lab is a platform for corporations, governments, farmers' associations, and NGOs to work together to accelerate the

0.1/ What are Social Labs

incorporation of environmental, economic, and social sustainability into the world's food production systems. The group took two years to develop a shared view of their challenges and devise a series of experiments to test solutions. Out of that work came a number of changes in large corporations' procurement practices, increased support for small-holder farmers, and more sustainable farming practices. Ten years later, the Sustainable Food Lab continues to be a platform for innovation.

See www.social-labs.org for more information including case studies.

WHAT SOCIAL LABS ARE NOT

Labs most traditionally can be thoughts of as physical spaces. But they are also institutional spaces that support particular practices, such as research and innovation. The dominant institutions that are currently tasked with addressing complex social challenges are arguably failing because they are not supportive of the types of practices needed to crack these challenges.

What makes a lab a lab is (1) the focus on a specific challenge or domain (2) a stable space supportive of the practices required to address that challenge and (3) a disciplined practice of experimentation.

Social labs are different from traditional labs in that they required a team that reflects the social diversity of the challenges they're addressing to do the work. In other words social labs are different in that they are not run by teams of scientists or technocrats but diverse teams of stakeholders.

According to this definition then social labs are not:
- Programmes
- Projects
- Networks
- Co-working spaces
- Incubators
- Accelerators

and of-course, simply branding something a "lab" does not make it a lab.

0.2/ Building Social Labs

"A building, or a town, is given its character, essentially, by those events which keep on happening there most often." - Christopher Alexander

How do we go about building social labs?

This Fieldbook proposes a specific architecture for social labs, one that consists of three to four "stacks." What is a "stack"?

A "stack" can be thought of as the basic unit of architecture of a lab, a bit like a business unit in an organization with a specialized function. Organisations typically consist of different "business units" that make up an organization. Imagine a widget manufacturing company. There are business units like Sales & Marketing, HR, and Production. Production might be a factory floor, where the widgets are build. The "space" of the factory floor is a very different space from where Sales & Marketing function. When thinking about social labs, we have to reconfigure our perception from "business units" to "stacks".

Each stack plays a specific function in a social lab. When these stacks are "built" and working together then we have a functioning social lab. Building a social lab at a minimum involves running three stacks – innovation, information and governance.

Each stack can be thought of as comprising at least three different elements. Firstly there is the space – so if we're talking about innovation, where is this work happening?

In a traditional laboratory, the answer is "in the laboratory". In a social lab though, the space of the lab is a heterodox space, comprising not one single space but multiple spaces. For example, the space of a workshop, of a learning journey or of an interview with a key stakeholder. So there is the design of these spaces. Then there are the processes that unfold in these spaces. What is it that happens in these spaces? What processes unfold? Again, unlike tradition labs, inside a social lab multiple processes are unfolding. Processes that enable stakeholders to think, reflect and act together. Then finally, there are the teams that go through these processes and there are multiple teams.

0.2/ Building Social Labs

This Fieldbook attempts to support practitioners who are interested in building social labs. It provides practical, step-by-step guidance as to how to design spaces, run processes and build the team requires to run labs. The approach suggested is to work consciously on the design of each stack and cultivate each of these stacks over time.

One of the challenges we face in addressing complex social challenges is the type of organization we work in. In the current climate, many funders and donors believe that innovation can be executed as if we were manufacturing widgits – that is through compliance to technical standards that minimize risk and waste. But unfortunately this is not how innovation arises. Innovation is best thought of as a high-risk, high-reward situation. Trying to turn this into a low-risk, high-reward situation makes little sense. Risk of-course can be managed and mitigated but it cannot be eliminated.

Seth Godin spells out the differences between these two approaches.

Lab vs Factory

You work at one, or the other.

At the lab, the pressure is to keep searching for a breakthrough, a new way to do things. And it's accepted that the cost of this insight is failure, finding out what doesn't work on your way to figuring out what does. The lab doesn't worry so much about exploiting all the value of what it produces—they're too busy working on the next thing.

To work in the lab is to embrace the idea that what you're working on might not work. Not to merely tolerate this feeling, but to seek it out.

The factory, on the other hand, prizes reliability and productivity. The factory wants no surprises, it wants what it did yesterday, but faster and cheaper.

Some charities are labs, in search of the new thing, while others are factories, grinding out what's needed today. AT&T is a billing factory, in search of lower costs, while Bell Labs was the classic lab, in search of the insight that could change everything.

Hard, really hard, to do both simultaneously. Anyone who says failure is not an option has also ruled out innovation.

- Seth Godin

0.3/ Social Labs: Return on Investment
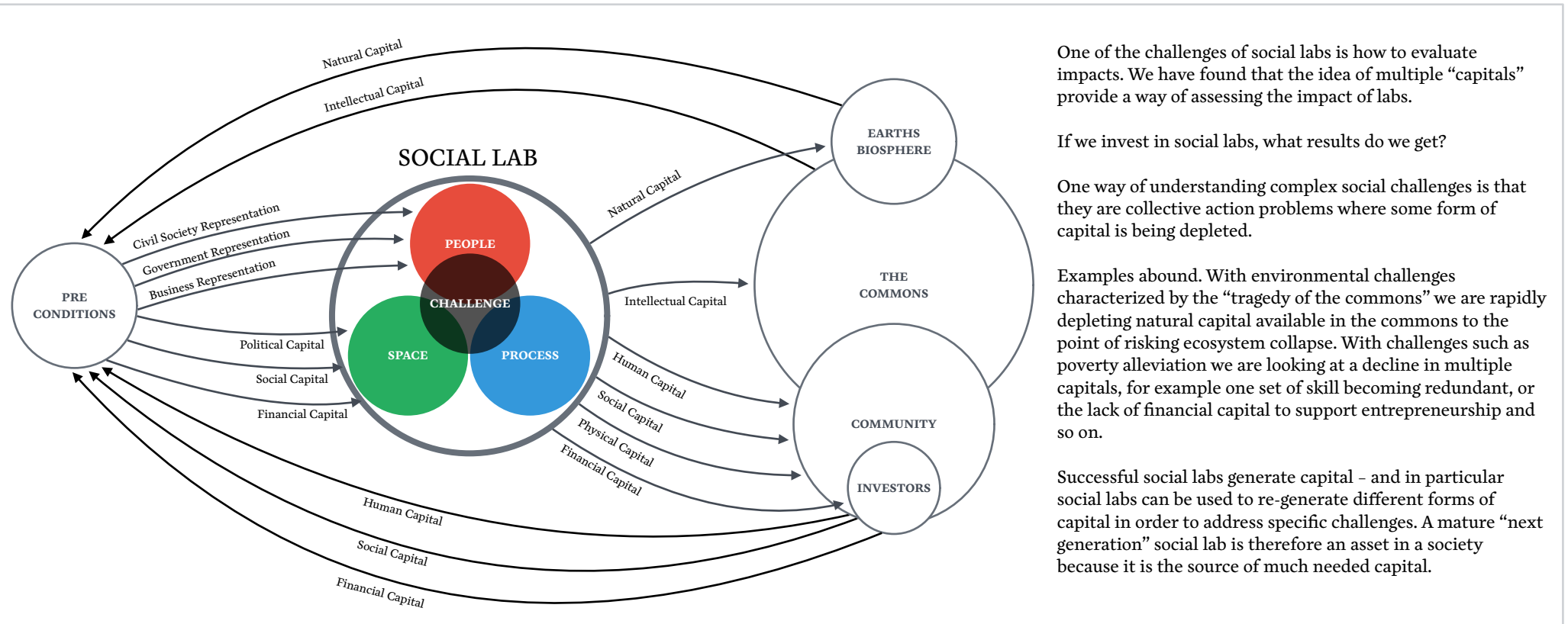
One of the challenges of social labs is how to evaluate impacts. We have found that the idea of multiple "capitals" provide a way of assessing the impact of labs.

If we invest in social labs, what results do we get?

One way of understanding complex social challenges is that they are collective action problems where some form of capital is being depleted.

Examples abound. With environmental challenges characterized by the "tragedy of the commons" we are rapidly depleting natural capital available in the commons to the point of risking ecosystem collapse. With challenges such as poverty alleviation we are looking at a decline in multiple capitals, for example one set of skill becoming redundant, or the lack of financial capital to support entrepreneurship and so on.

Successful social labs generate capital – and in particular social labs can be used to re-generate different forms of capital in order to address specific challenges. A mature "next generation" social lab is therefore an asset in a society because it is the source of much needed capital.

✎ NOTES

0.4/ The 5 Stages of Skill Acquisition

To become competent you must feel bad. - Hubert Dreyfus

Social labs require a broad range of skills sets. In running multiple labs we've seen that in practice these skills are acquired in stages.

Consider one model of how we acquire skills, the Dreyfus Model, which takes us through five stages of skills acquisition.

Table 1. Five Stages of Skill Acquisition

Skill Level	Components	Perspective	Decision	Commitment
1. Novice	Context free	None	Analytic	Detached
2. Advanced beginner	Context free and situational	None	Analytic	Detached
3. Competent	Context free and situational	Chosen	Analytic	Detached understanding and deciding; involved outcome
4. Proficient	Context free and situational	Experienced	Analytic	Involved understanding; detached deciding
5. Expert	Context free and situational	Experienced	Intuitive	Involved

Contrasting the the "novice" with the "expert":

"The beginner is then given rules for determining actions on the basis of these features, just like a computer following a program."

Versus

"The expert not only sees what needs to be achieved; thanks to his or her vast repertoire of situational discriminations, he or she also sees immediately how to achieve this goal. Thus, the ability to make more subtle and refined discriminations is what distinguishes the expert from the proficient performer."

Dreyfus goes on to say that the expert does not actually perform a situational analysis but is largely operating by intuition.

"Thus, the ability to make more subtle and refined discriminations is what distinguishes the expert from the proficient performer. Among many situations, all seen as similar with respect to plan or perspective, the expert has learned to distinguish those situations requiring one reaction from those demanding another.

That is, with enough experience in a variety of situations, all seen from the same perspective but requiring different tactical decisions, the brain of the expert gradually decomposes this class of situations into subclasses, each of which requires a specific response. This allows the immediate intuitive situational response that is characteristic of expertise."

The implication of all this is that "toolkits" - 2-d documents that present a series of "tools" - are really useful for "novices" and "advanced beginners." This is partly because toolkits – and fieldbooks – are largely decontextualized. They do not have much to say about the specific situation you find yourself in.

A good "toolkit" however can help accelerate the learning process, as we'll see below.

While the nature of all expertise is situational, this is perhaps even more true with social labs. This is because we are trying to deal with complex social challenges where the "complex" frequently involves people and their behavior.

While every context is different, so for example, a community in Kenya dealing with a mega-project is different from a government department in Canada dealing with a healthcare issue – we learn to recognize classes of situations. We learn to recognize situations where certain approaches will work. Developing this discernment is what makes a practitioner good at what they do.

And the only way of developing this discernment is experience.

0.5/ Short-Circuiting the 10,000 Hour Rule

"Managers tend to pick a strategy that is the least likely to fail, rather then to pick a strategy that is most efficient," Said Palmer. " The pain of looking bad is worse than the gain of making the best move."
— Michael Lewis, Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game

According to the 10,000 hour "rule" (also known as the "10 year rule") in order to become "expert" at something we need to practice it for 10,000 hours. While not strictly a "rule" it is a useful "rule-of-thumb" in terms of thinking about what it means to be world class at something.

The good news is that studies on skills acquisition, for example in the world of professional sports, however, have shown that the "rule" is not strictly true. In fact some people can become world class with a lot less and some don't become world-class with twice as much practice. One way of thinking about this is that getting world-class at something comes from a combination of "software" – that is, training and practice, and "hardware" – things like genes and neurons.

The skills required to successfully run social labs are extremely broad. They range from group facilitation skills to story-telling skills. It is virtually impossible for any one person to be world-class at all of them. Another way of understanding this is that the range of skills required in order to deal with complex challenges required a group characterized by a diverse range of skills.

In many ways the strategy for building a team that is world-class at running successful social labs is no different from strategies for putting together world-class football teams. You have to acquire talent.

One of the biggest challenges to running social labs at the moment is that it is not seen as a full-time, professional activity. At best it's a full-time professional activity and at worst it's a volunteer role, done on top of "real world" work. This is a little like the days when barbers were also doctors. As the field matures, we will see the rise of full-time, professional teams.

The strategy of learning how to be world-class in all the skills required to run a social lab is simply not going to happen. At the individual level it's a matter of figuring out what you're best at doing – through both your "software" and "hardware" and doing it. The things you're not naturally gifted at doing requires finding those who are. And those who have a natural aptitude for certain tasks will probably beat the 10,000 hour rule. So the best way of building a world-class team is to find and nurture talent.

0.6/ The Organisation of This Fieldbook

This book is organized into four sections, each corresponding to a different "stack" in a social lab. A "stack" can be thought of as the basic unit of architecture of a lab, a bit like a floor in a building with a specialized function. Obviously those of you with creative tendencies can design labs to have more stacks than the four outlined here, less stacks or a completely different architecture. The idea is, "to break the rules but break them beautifully." So here is one way of conceptualizing the different "spaces" within a lab.

The practices described under each stack are techniques that have largely originated in other places (for example in software development or design). This is a little like the fact that medical labs do not re-invent test tubes every time a new lab is founded, rather they build on existing practices.

The book is organized around the following 4 stacks:

Stack One: Innovation

The innovation stack is probably the part of a social lab that we most imagine when we think of a lab. It is where "innovation" happens. Innovation can be thought of as "problem solving" but that phrase has some problems (sorry) as we will see.

Stack Two: Information

A key characteristic of complex systems is information. Complex systems both generate and use information. Being able to successfully work with information is a core (and non-negotiable) requirement for a lab. A lab that doesn't document or share it's findings is not really a lab.

Stack Three: Governance

The word "governance" is a catchall primarily concerned with decision-making. It refers to how decisions within a social lab are made. Who decides what where and when? If we were being technically accurate this stack can be thought of as being comprised of two stacks, "governance" and "facilitation." In a traditional system this could be thought of as "governance" and "management" or an "executive function." We will distinguish and describe the functions required to govern and facilitate a lab in this section.

Stack Four: Capacity

Many of the capacities required in the running of a social lab are new. Some capacities are specific to a particular lab while others are commons to all social labs. At the moment there is no single place someone can go to learn these skills. So a critical part of running social labs is to expand the capacities and skills required to run them. Think of the capacity stack as a like a little university for systemic change.
A note on stacks.

It is important to note that some of these stacks are not clearly delineated and overlapping.

For example, governance without information is impossible.

Of all the stacks here, we would suggest that stacks 1-3 are core, essential and non-negotiable – as in, it's impossible to run a lab without them.

The final stack, capacity, is optional, as capacities to run the lab could be built outside the lab and bought in.

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0/ Core Concepts

0.7/ The Characteristics of Complexity

EMERGENCE

COMPLEXITY

ADAPTATION   INFORMATION
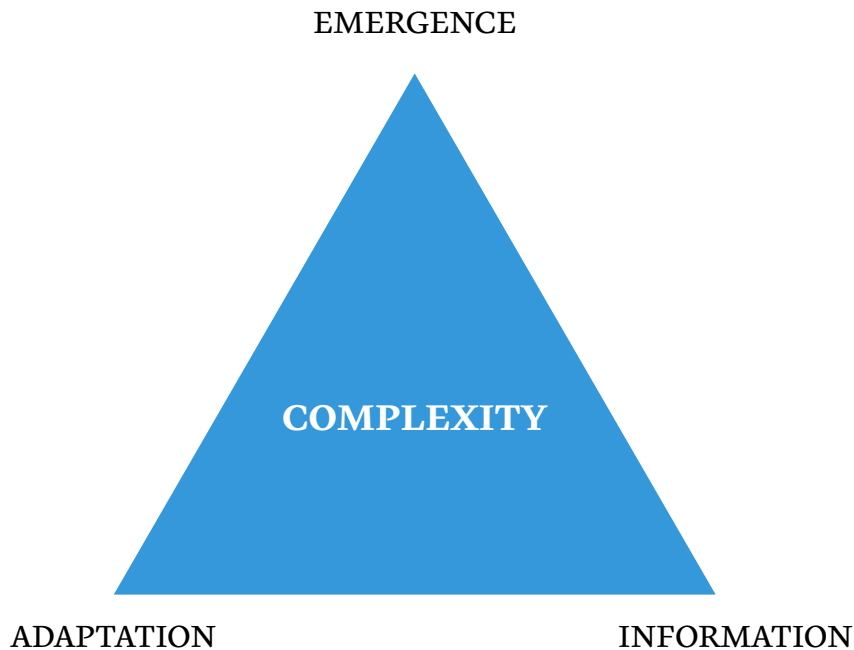
"Complex social challenges are emergent because their properties arise from the interaction of many parts. Imagine the difference between throwing a rock and throwing a live bird. The rock will follow a path that is predictable, that is, it can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy in advance. The path of the bird, on the other hand, is emergent, which means that path cannot be predicted in advance. It emerges from the interactions of many factors from the physiology of the bird to environmental factors.The system of the person (throwing the bird) and the bird is therefore said characterized by emergence.In complex systems new information is constantly being generated. When we study a complex system, we are deluged by new information. If we tied a GPS to the bird and tracked its movements,we would be capturing a new stream of information about the where the bird was going. (According to Nate Silver, "IBM estimates we are generating 2.5 quintillion bytes of data per day, more than 90 percent of which was created in the last two years.") This new information gives rise to the third characteristic of a complex system, that of adaptive behavior. This means that actors in complex systems are constantly and autonomously adjusting their behaviors in response to new information. This feedback loop in turn gives rise to a whole new set of emergent characteristics. If our task is to re-capture the bird once it's been thrown, then we use information to adapt our behaviors to ensure we succeed."

The Social Labs Revolution: A new approach to solving our most complex challenges - Zaid Hassan (Berret-Koehler 2014)

✎ NOTES

0.8/ Strategic Planning (Don't Do It)

PREDICTIVE
(linear)

TARGETS

DETACHED
(homogenous)

FORMAL
(flatland)
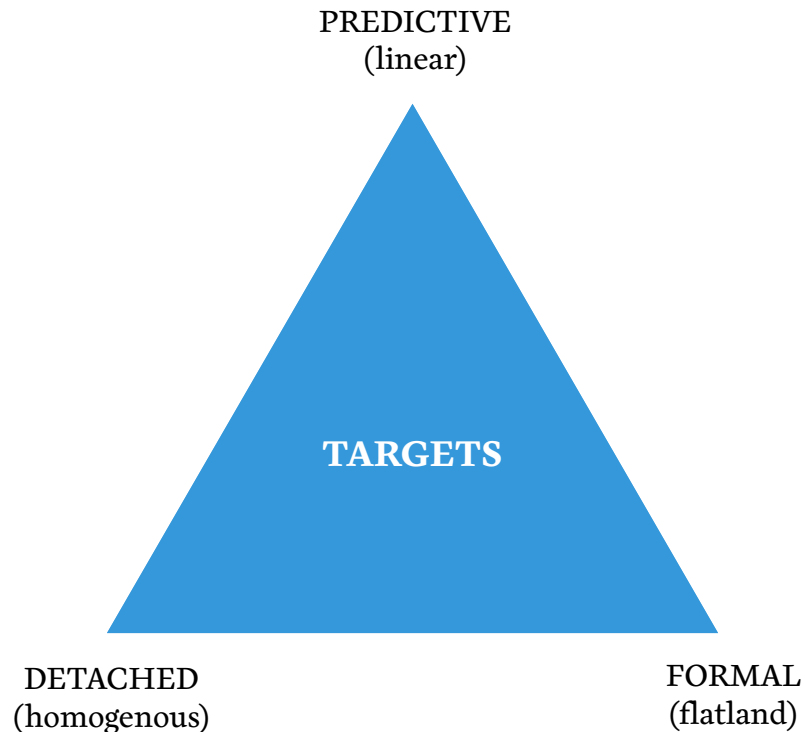
Strategic planning is the dominant response to addressing complex social challenges. Unfortunately there is very little evidence to demonstrate that strategic planning as an approach is successful in situations of complexity, despite the prevalence of the approach. It is important to remember that a critique of "strategic planning" is NOT a critique of being "strategic" and nor does it mean we eschew "planning." A critique of "strategic planning" is a critique of a specific "neo-Soviet" culture that is currently common. Social labs represent a form of emergent strategy, demonstrating a more effective response to addressing complex challenges.

"[This] banishment of messy and potentially embarrassing emotions is one hallmark of the expert-planning paradigm. Mintzberg has summarized these problems as the fallacies of detachment, predetermination, and formalism.[19] Detachment means experts are detached from the situation on the ground and critically have no skin in the game.[20] Predetermination means that activities are plotted out in advance, and in the most pernicious instances they do not change. Finally formalism means that if it cannot be measured or somehow expressed on paper, it cannot be taken into consideration."

The Social Labs Revolution: A new approach to solving our most complex challenges - Zaid Hassan (Berret-Koehler 2014)
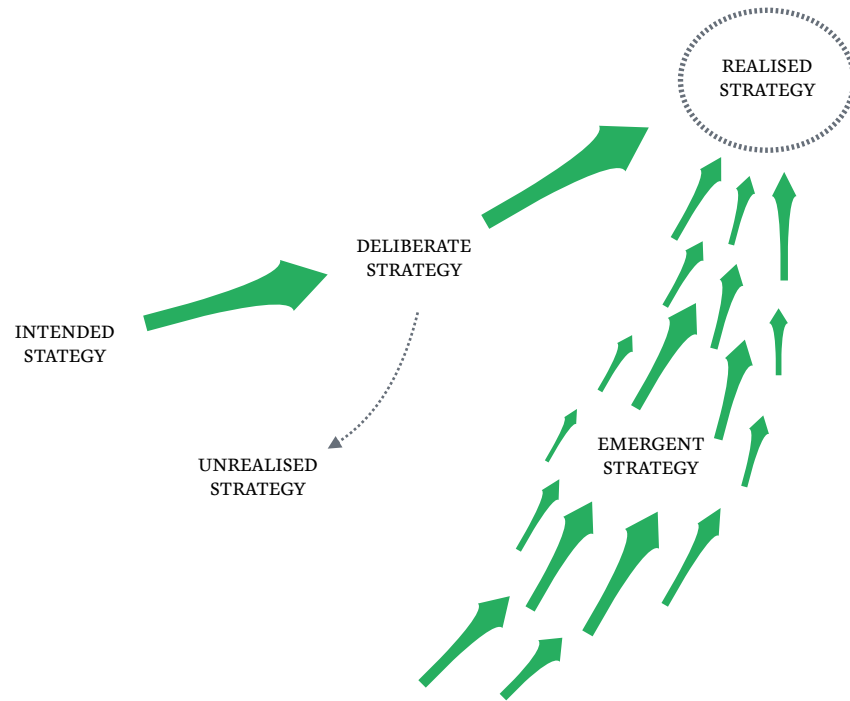
✐ NOTES

0.9/ Emergent Strategies

REALISED STRATEGY

INTENDED STATEGY

DELIBERATE STRATEGY

UNREALISED STRATEGY

EMERGENT STRATEGY

"A good strategy has an essential logical structure that I call the kernel. The kernel of a strategy contains three elements: a diagnosis, a guiding policy, and coherent action. The guiding policy specifies the approach to dealing with the obstacles called out in the diagnosis. It is like a signpost, marking the direction forward but not defining the details of the trip. Coherent actions are feasible coordinated policies, resource commitments, and actions designed to carry out the guiding policy."

Good Strategy Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters by Richard Rumelt

Source: LHS diagram - Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent
Author(s): Henry Mintzberg and James A. Waters

✐ NOTES

0.10/ Elements of Social Labs

PROCESS
(experimental)

INTENTION

TEAM
(social)

SPACE
(systemic)
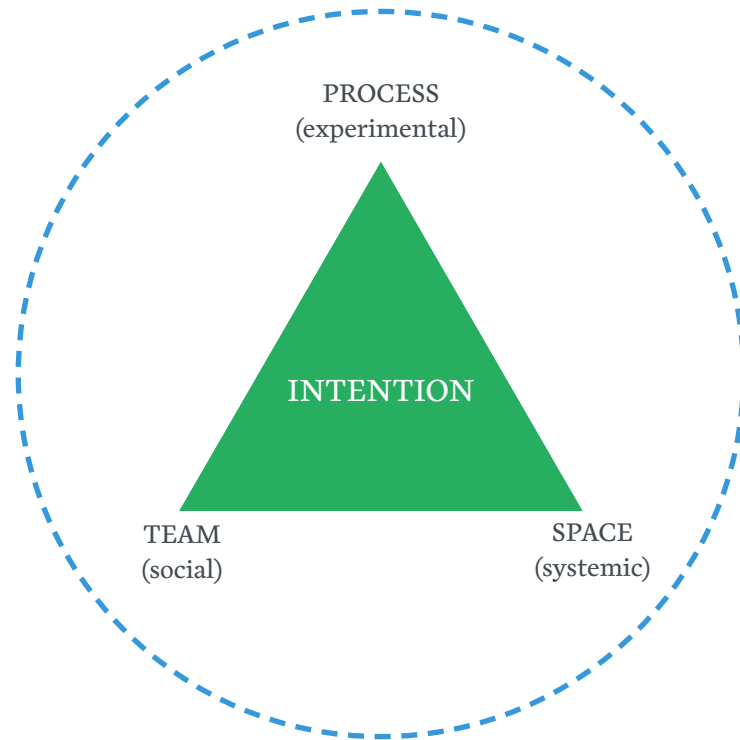
Social labs have 3 elements:

1.They are social. Social labs start by bringing together diverse participants to work in a team that acts collectively. They are ideally drawn from different sectors of society, such as government, civil society, and the business community. The participation of diverse stakeholders beyond consultation, as opposed to teams of experts or technocrats, represents the social nature of social labs.

2. They are experimental. Social labs are not one-off experiences. They're ongoing and sustained efforts. The team doing the work takes an iterative approach to the challenges it wants to address, prototyping interventions and managing a portfolio of promising solutions. This reflects the experimental nature of social labs, as opposed to the project-based nature of many social interventions.

3. They are systemic. The ideas and initiatives developing in social labs, released as prototypes, aspire to be systemic in nature. This means trying to come up with solutions that go beyond dealing with a part of the whole or symptoms and address the root cause of why things are not working in the first place.

The Social Labs Revolution: A new approach to solving our most complex challenges - Zaid Hassan (Berret-Koehler 2014)

✎ NOTES

0.11/ Establishing Preconditions

RESOURCES

What resources do we need?

CHALLENGE

What is the challenge we want to address?

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

What direction should we take?

PEOPLE

Who do we need to address the challenge?

In order to take action is any situation a set of preconditions needs to be met. These are: Challenge – can we clearly state what the challenge is that we want to address? Do we have the necessary Resources to start work? Do we have the right People (in terms of either skills or representation) on board? And finally, do we have some sense of Strategic Direction – our best guess as to what might address the challenge we wish to address?

Preconditions represent a starting-point and not an end point. They are, if you like, a little like pulling together everything you need in order to start an expedition. Starting an expedition without each of these preconditions in place risks failure. Forgetting to take enough water or to take a readily available map represent a type of failure that can easily be avoided.

Finally, preconditions should not be confused for a "strategy" – they are literally preconditions for your strategy.

✎ NOTES

0.11.1/ Establishing Preconditions - The Challenge

CHALLENGE

FUZZY
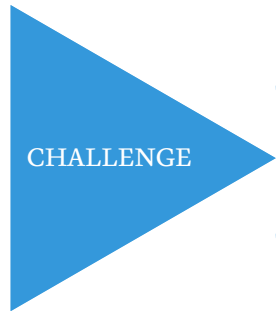
- How can we together prevent mental health problems from developing in young people?

- How can we together reduce emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere?

- How can we together improve the quality of public education?

- How can we together prevent mental health problems from developing in young people aged 10-14 globally?

- How can we together reduce emissions of CO2e by 200MT in 2 years in Europe?

- How can we together improve the quality of public education in low-income neighborhoods in Istanbul?

QUANTIFIABLE

What is the challenge you wish to address? Can you clearly state it? Does your statement of challenge communicate incorporate some sense of a diagnostic? For a challenge statement to be effective it must communicate why the challenge matters specifically. Starting work without a challenge statement is a little bit like stating you want to climb a mountain but don't know the details of which one. Each challenge has features that are specific to it, in terms of geography, scale and other details. A challenge statement must give some ideas as to these details – where and at what scale? A clear challenge statement is an essential part of good strategy.

✎ NOTES

0.11.2/ Establishing Preconditions - Resources

RESOURCES

| POLITICAL | SOCIAL | FINANCIAL |

CHALLENGE → STRATEGIC DIRECTION

PEOPLE

GLOBAL

REGION

COUNTRY

CITY

NEIGHBOURHOOD

LOCAL ←→ GLOBAL
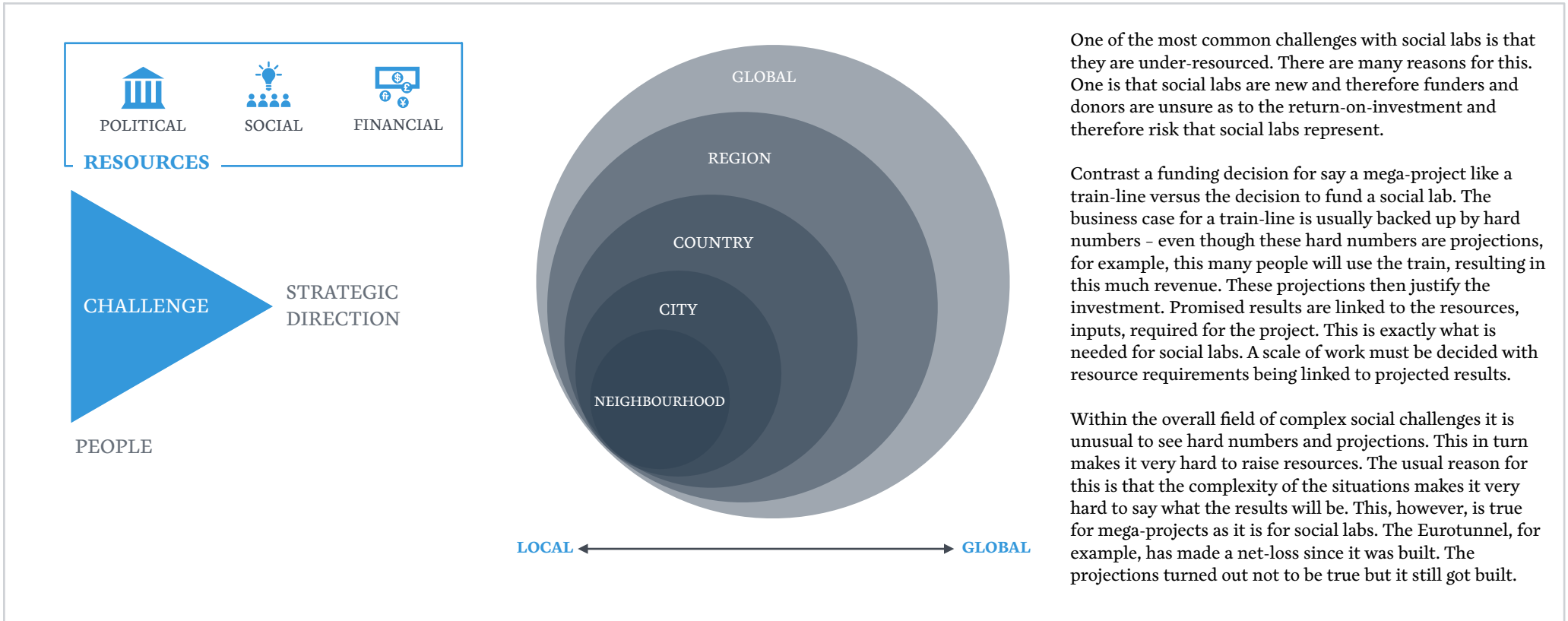
One of the most common challenges with social labs is that they are under-resourced. There are many reasons for this. One is that social labs are new and therefore funders and donors are unsure as to the return-on-investment and therefore risk that social labs represent.

Contrast a funding decision for say a mega-project like a train-line versus the decision to fund a social lab. The business case for a train-line is usually backed up by hard numbers – even though these hard numbers are projections, for example, this many people will use the train, resulting in this much revenue. These projections then justify the investment. Promised results are linked to the resources, inputs, required for the project. This is exactly what is needed for social labs. A scale of work must be decided with resource requirements being linked to projected results.

Within the overall field of complex social challenges it is unusual to see hard numbers and projections. This in turn makes it very hard to raise resources. The usual reason for this is that the complexity of the situations makes it very hard to say what the results will be. This, however, is true for mega-projects as it is for social labs. The Eurotunnel, for example, has made a net-loss since it was built. The projections turned out not to be true but it still got built.

✏️ NOTES

0.11.3/ Establishing Preconditions - People

RESOURCES

CHALLENGE → STRATEGIC DIRECTION

PEOPLE

GOVERNMENT   CIVIL SOCIETY   BUSINESS

PUBLIC

COLLEAGUES OF COLLEAGUES

COLLEAGUES

FRIENDS

HOT ←——————————————→ **COLD**
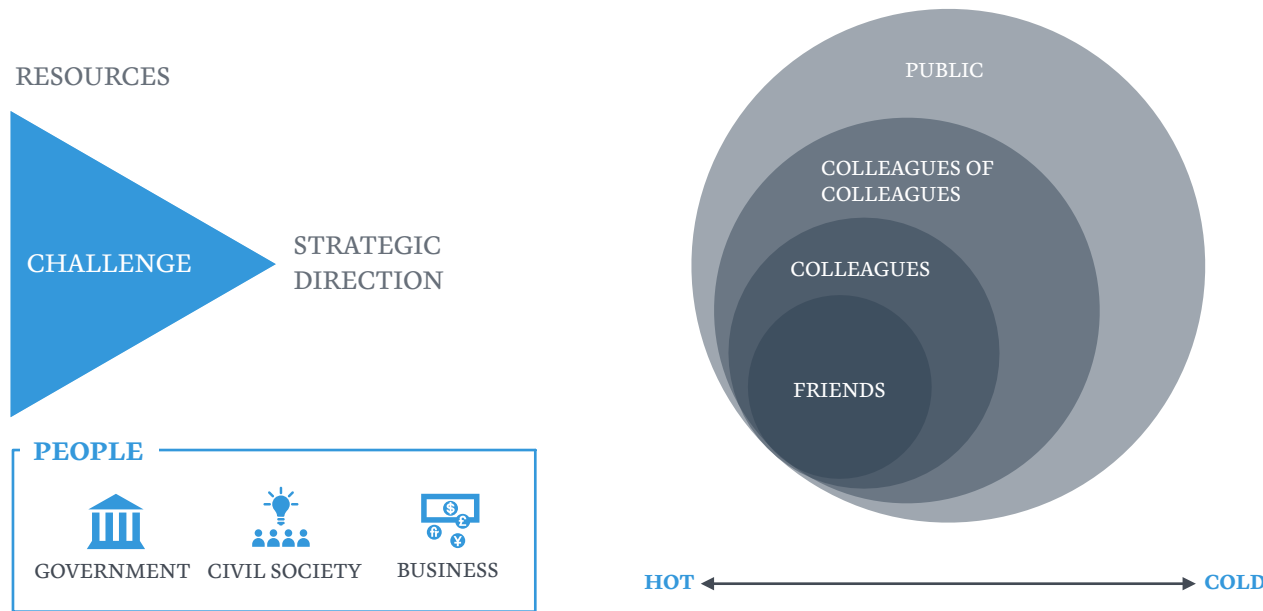
Social labs are constituted from multiple teams, from lab team members to champions. The success of a social lab is a function of the people that are a part of it. Who do you need to participate in the lab if it is to succeed? The question can be answered along two dimensions related to the challenge. The first is representation – which parts of the system do you need represented within the lab? The second is skills – what skills or capacities are needed? Depending on the nature of the challenge, it's scope and scale, different people are needed. In order to meet preconditions a number of people will need to be recruited to the lab. The best starting point for recruitment of key people into the lab are people whom are known, friends or colleagues, then moving out to stakeholders who are "colder", friends of friends and colleagues of colleagues. Ideally the kernel of key people will comes from people with whom the convenors of the lab have some social capital with.

✎ NOTES

0.11.4/ Establishing Preconditions - Strategic Direction

RESOURCES

CHALLENGE

PEOPLE

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

INSTITUTIONAL

ENTREPRENEURIAL

"INSIDE"

"OUTSIDE"

Responding strategically to complex social challenges requires making a choice in direction. If we take a challenge such as youth unemployment, then there are a range of directions one can choose. For example, we could focus on formal schooling, we could focus on vocational training, or we could focus on supporting entrepreneurship. Each of these options represents a strategic direction – our best guess as to the domain or area to focus on in responding.

Making a decision about strategic direction requires domain knowledge. If working on youth unemployment, then it requires an understanding of what strategies are currently being tried, what's working and what's not working.

Strategic direction ideally arises from dialogue. It should emerge from talking to key stakeholders and research on the state of the field. A key issue to overcome with establishing strategic direction is openness to hearing ideas that may be new. All too often strategic direction is set by a key stakeholder, such as a donor, making the decision unilaterally- with the decision often being cloaked in the legitimacy of consultation. Rather than taking a deductive approach – where we form a hypothesis and then search for the evidence to support it, our approach should be inductive, where we see what the evidence is telling us.

✎ NOTES

0.11.5/ Establishing Preconditions - Tactics

RESOURCES

POLITICAL
Campaigning
Lobbying

SOCIAL
Community Building
Dialogue Interviews
Learning Journey

FINANCIAL
"The Case" - ROI
Philanthropic
Venture
Impact

CHALLENGE

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

STRATEGIES
Domain Expertise
Diagnostic Interview
Desk Research
Ethnography

PEOPLE

CONVENOR

OPEN CONVENING
Push - "Broadcast"

CLOSED CONVENING
Pull "Narrowcast"

Putting in place the pre-conditions for a social lab requires the use and mastery of multiple tactics. These range from approaches to recruitment, such as open convening, through to activities such as campaigning or lobbying. This Fieldbook outlines a number of key tactics in later sections.

"Addressing complex social challenges requires deep strategic commitment coupled with radical tactical flexibility. We are required by the nature of the challenge to take a long-term view, to make serious strategic commitments that survive short-term reversals of fortune. At the same time, we need to take an experimental approach, to try things out and hold them lightly. This combination of deep strategic commitment with tactical lightness is very hard to pull off because it simultaneously requires different temperaments.

In fact, dominant responses to complex social challenges often confuse what we need to hold fast to versus what we need to hold lightly. Our commitments should not be to tactics— to a particular plan or technique. Rather, we should reserve our deepest commitments for strategic goals."

NOTES

0.12/ Spaces - Design in Stacks
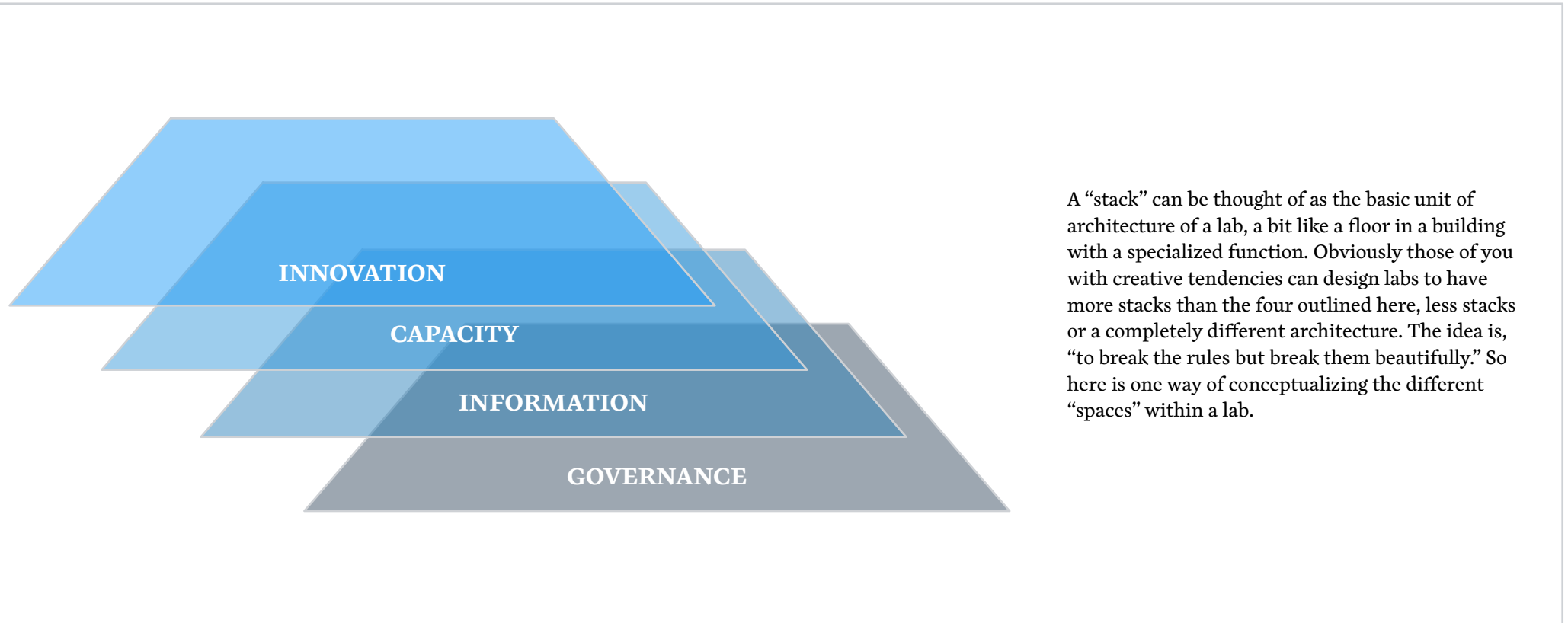
INNOVATION

CAPACITY

INFORMATION

GOVERNANCE

A "stack" can be thought of as the basic unit of architecture of a lab, a bit like a floor in a building with a specialized function. Obviously those of you with creative tendencies can design labs to have more stacks than the four outlined here, less stacks or a completely different architecture. The idea is, "to break the rules but break them beautifully." So here is one way of conceptualizing the different "spaces" within a lab.

✎ NOTES

0.12.1/ Spaces - Governance Design

INNOVATION
CAPACITY
INFORMATION

Investors / Champions

UP

ACROSS

GOVERNANCE

ACROSS

DOWN

Stakeholders
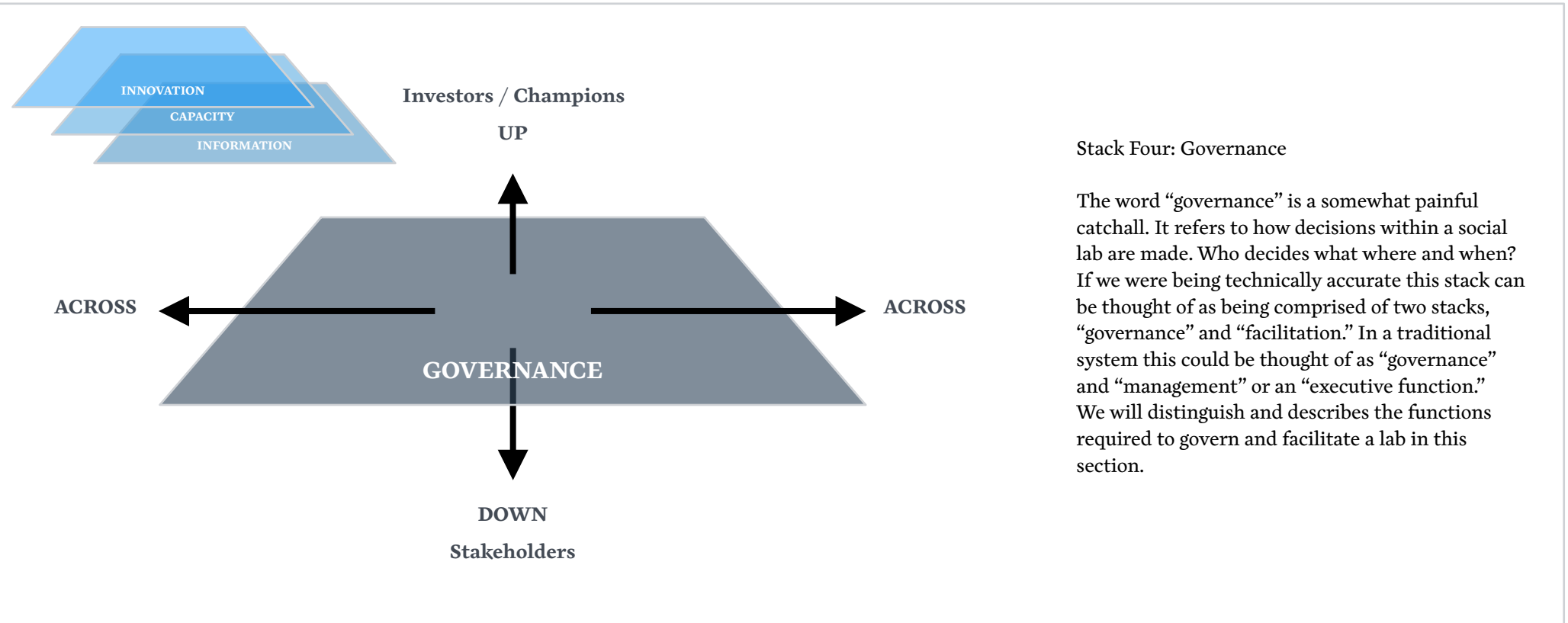
Stack Four: Governance

The word "governance" is a somewhat painful catchall. It refers to how decisions within a social lab are made. Who decides what where and when? If we were being technically accurate this stack can be thought of as being comprised of two stacks, "governance" and "facilitation." In a traditional system this could be thought of as "governance" and "management" or an "executive function." We will distinguish and describes the functions required to govern and facilitate a lab in this section.

✎ NOTES

0.12.2/ Spaces - Information Design

Stack Two: Information

A key characteristic of complex systems is information. Complex systems both generate and use information. Being able to successfully work with information is a core (and non-negotiable) requirement for a lab. A lab that doesn't document or share it's findings is not really a lab. The purpose of information in the context of social labs is:

• Supporting the Lab Team to do their work

• Sharing the results of the Lab with an extended peer community

• Communicating up and down (to shareholders "above" and "below" us)

• Communicating "across" to those involved in the Lab

✎ NOTES

0.13/ Teams - Constituting The Team

MULTI MODAL
HEAD
HEART
HANDS

CORE TEAM

MIXED APPROACH
EGALITARIAN
MIXED
HIERARCHY

GOVERNMENT   CIVIL SOCIETY   BUSINESS
TRI SECTOR
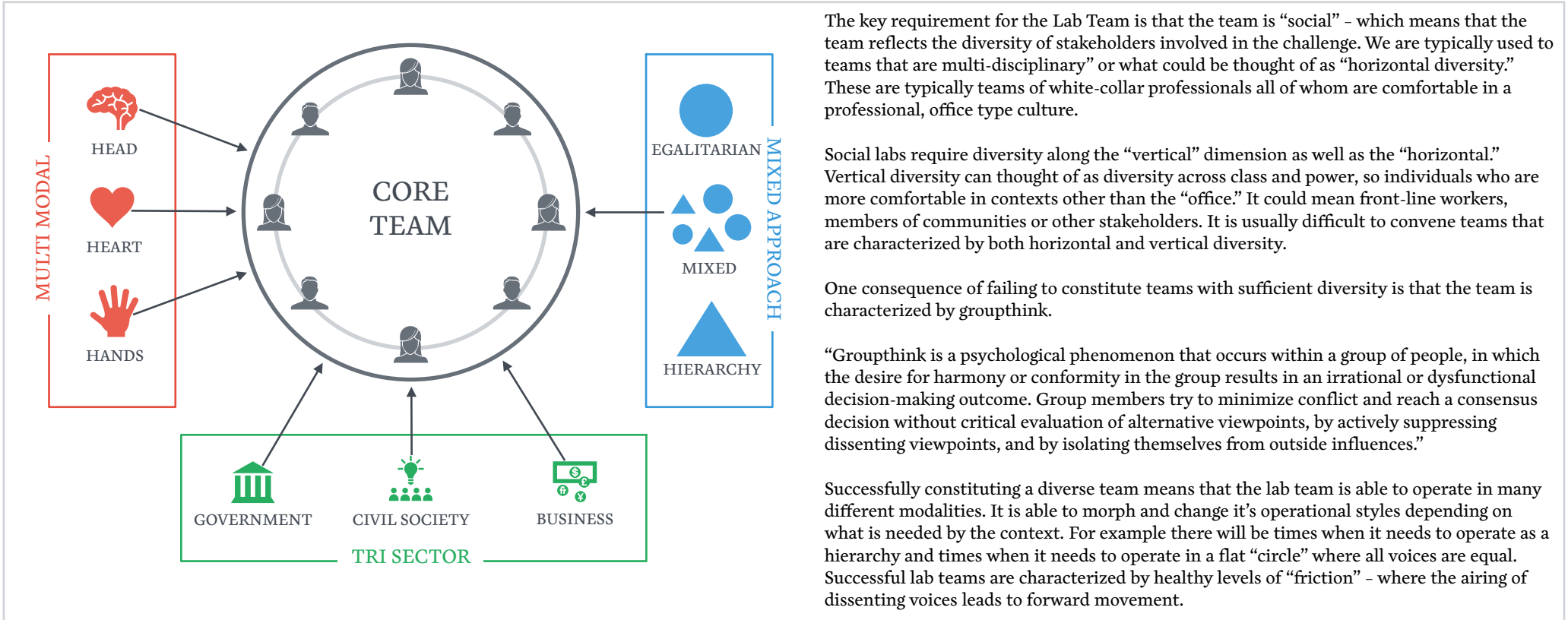
The key requirement for the Lab Team is that the team is "social" – which means that the team reflects the diversity of stakeholders involved in the challenge. We are typically used to teams that are multi-disciplinary" or what could be thought of as "horizontal diversity." These are typically teams of white-collar professionals all of whom are comfortable in a professional, office type culture.

Social labs require diversity along the "vertical" dimension as well as the "horizontal." Vertical diversity can thought of as diversity across class and power, so individuals who are more comfortable in contexts other than the "office." It could mean front-line workers, members of communities or other stakeholders. It is usually difficult to convene teams that are characterized by both horizontal and vertical diversity.
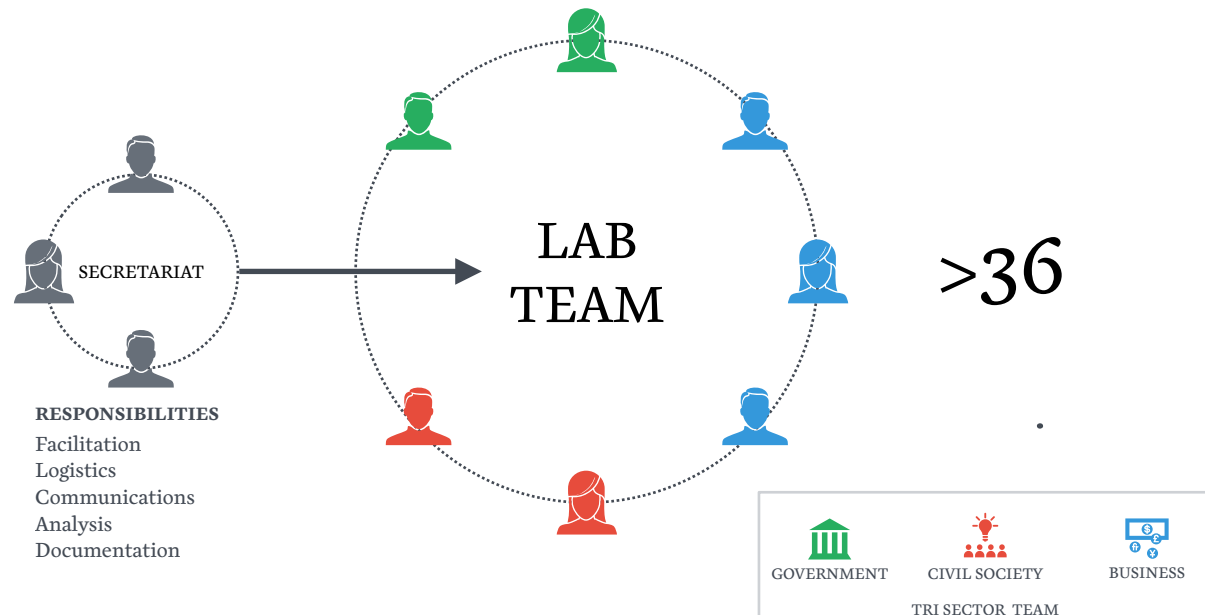
One consequence of failing to constitute teams with sufficient diversity is that the team is characterized by groupthink.

"Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people, in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in an irrational or dysfunctional decision-making outcome. Group members try to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation of alternative viewpoints, by actively suppressing dissenting viewpoints, and by isolating themselves from outside influences."

Successfully constituting a diverse team means that the lab team is able to operate in many different modalities. It is able to morph and change it's operational styles depending on what is needed by the context. For example there will be times when it needs to operate as a hierarchy and times when it needs to operate in a flat "circle" where all voices are equal. Successful lab teams are characterized by healthy levels of "friction" – where the airing of dissenting voices leads to forward movement.

✎ NOTES

0.13.1/ Teams - Start-Up Lab

SECRETARIAT

RESPONSIBILITIES
Facilitation
Logistics
Communications
Analysis
Documentation

LAB TEAM

>36

GOVERNMENT

CIVIL SOCIETY

BUSINESS

TRI SECTOR TEAM

The two core teams required to run a lab are the lab secretariat and the lab team. The lab team is constituted of key stakeholders relating to the challenge the lab aims to address, typically from civil society, government and business. The role of the lab secretariat is to support the lab team in their work, through providing a range of services, from facilitation to logistical support. In practice, these two teams are complemented by other teams in a governance role. The formal establishment of these teams is usually what marks the launch of a social lab.

✎ NOTES

0.13.2/ Teams - Lab-In-Progress

PROTOTYPING TEAMS

IDEA 1

IDEA 2

LAB
TEAM

IDEA 3

SECRETARIAT

IDEA 4

CONVENERS

IDEA 5
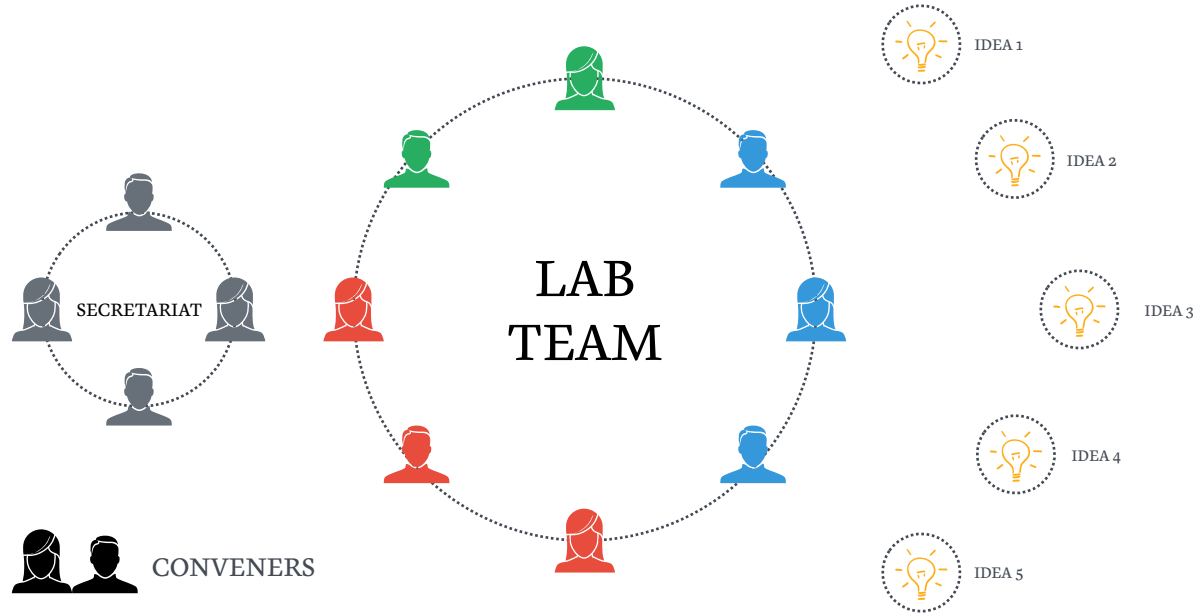
A lab-in-progress typically has multiple teams operating within it. In addition to the lab secretariat and the lab team, there may also be external donors or convenors. Additionally, once the lab starts prototyping work, then the lab team splits into several sub-teams, each focused around a prototype. Once prototyping teams form, it is normal to identify gaps in the team, leading to the recruitment of new lab team members. The growth of the lab team needs to be managed carefully, with formal induction processes. New lab team members need to clearly understand how decisions within the lab are made. The risk of not getting these things right is to undo the work of the lab team to date.
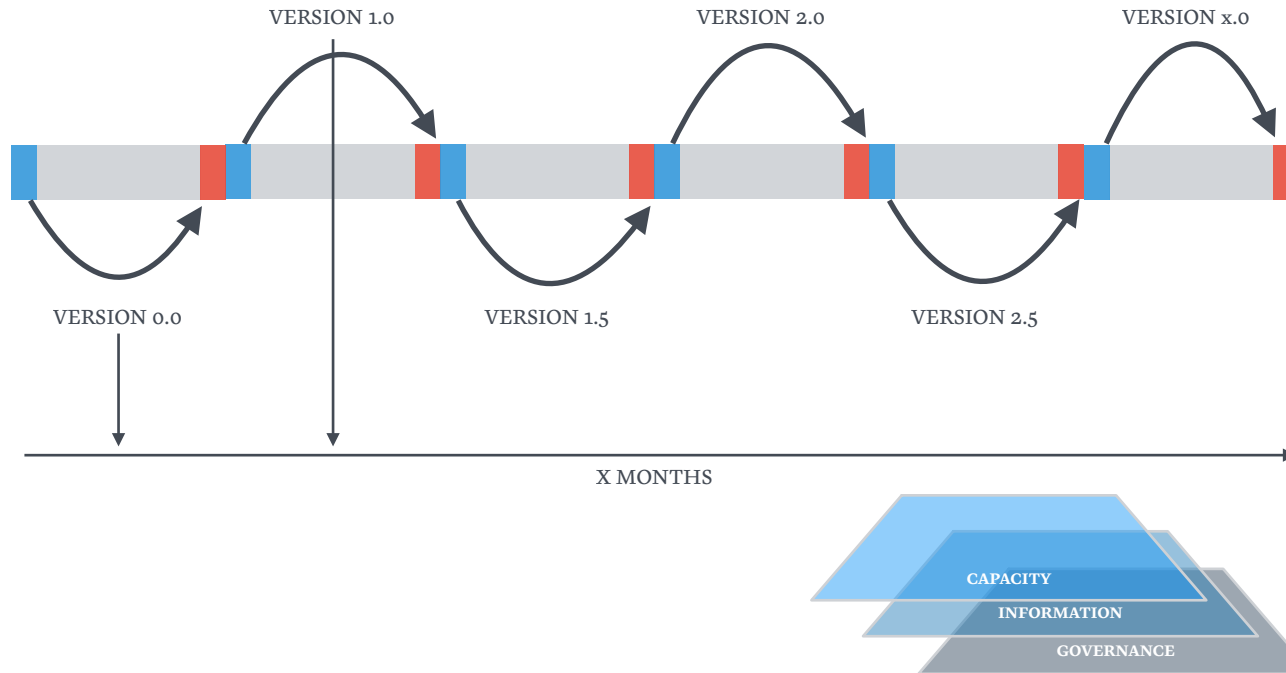
✎ NOTES

0.13.3/ Teams - Mature Lab

BOARD

CHAMPIONS

SECRETARIAT

LAB
TEAM

CONVENERS

PROTOTYPING TEAMS

IDEA 1

IDEA 2

IDEA 3

IDEA 4

IDEA 5
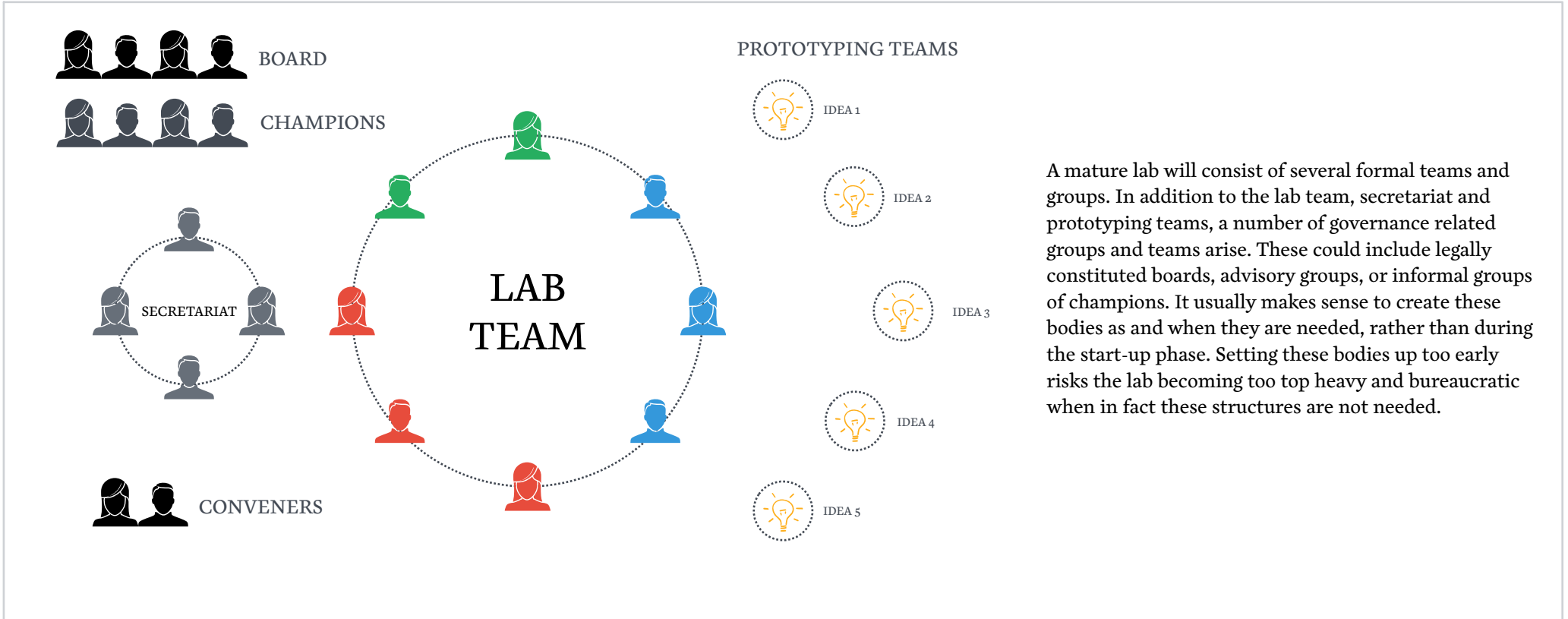
A mature lab will consist of several formal teams and groups. In addition to the lab team, secretariat and prototyping teams, a number of governance related groups and teams arise. These could include legally constituted boards, advisory groups, or informal groups of champions. It usually makes sense to create these bodies as and when they are needed, rather than during the start-up phase. Setting these bodies up too early risks the lab becoming too top heavy and bureaucratic when in fact these structures are not needed.

NOTES

0.14/ Processes - Innovation Design: Prototyping

VERSION 1.0

VERSION 2.0

VERSION x.0

VERSION 0.0

VERSION 1.5

VERSION 2.5

X MONTHS

CAPACITY

INFORMATION

GOVERNANCE
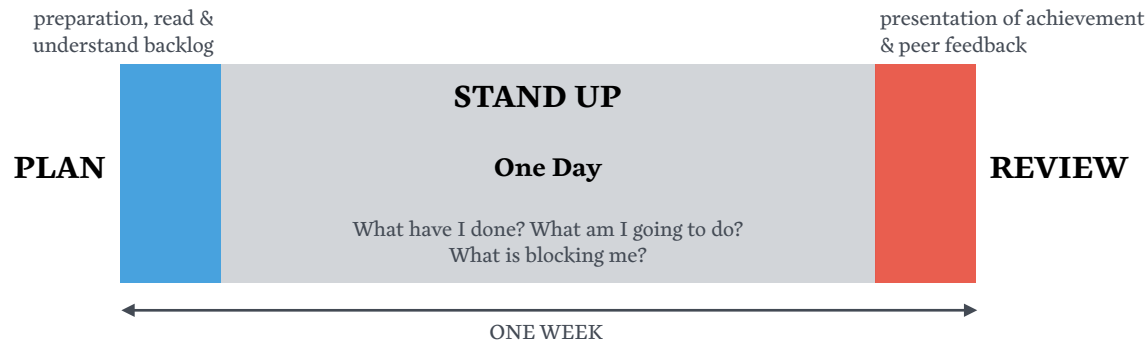
Stack One: Innovation

The innovation stack is probably the part of a social lab that we most imagine when we think of a lab. It is where "innovation" happens. Innovation can be thought of as "problem solving" but that phrase has some problems (sorry) as we will see.

✎ NOTES

0.14.1/ Processes - An Agile-Action Cycle

preparation, read &
understand backlog

presentation of achievement
& peer feedback

PLAN

STAND UP

One Day

What have I done? What am I going to do?
What is blocking me?

REVIEW

ONE WEEK

SUSTAINABLE PACE

Are we achieving anticipated velocity? (Internal to team)

RETROSPECTIVE

ONE MONTH

Drawing on lessons learnt from complex software development projects, agile management is a flexible project management methodology suited to action - learning initiatives. It provides the minimum structure required to effectively manage the social prototyping phase.
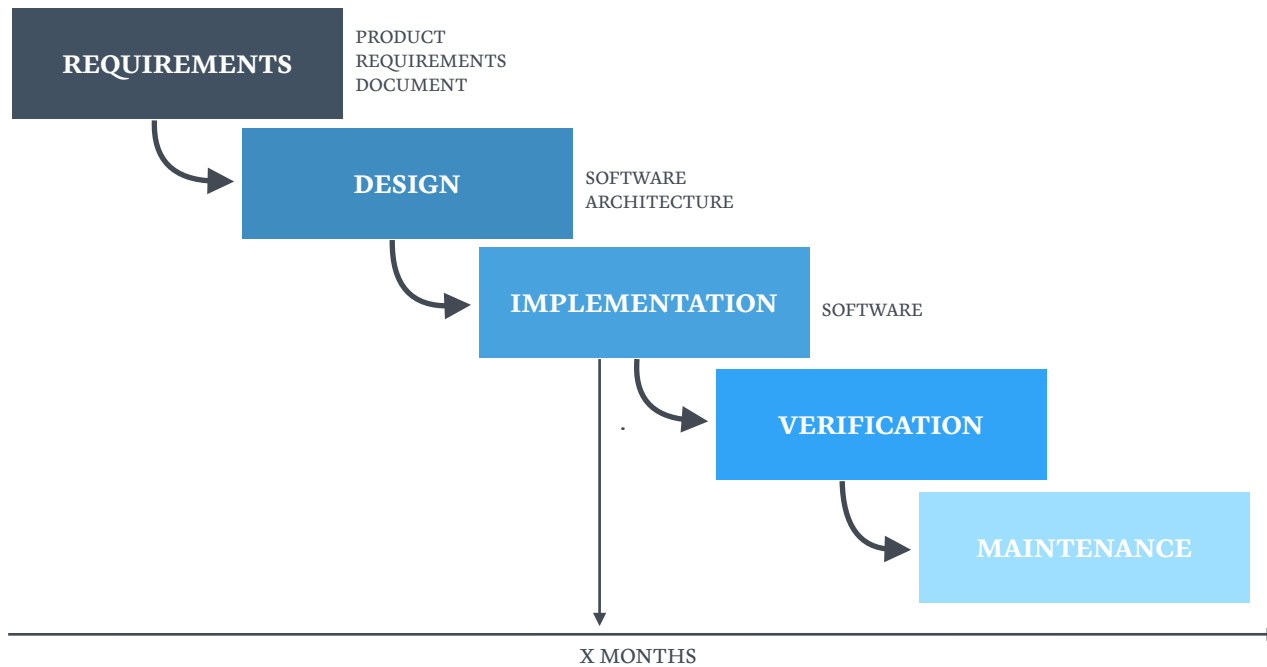
Innovative prototypes are created in 'agile cycles' of between two weeks and one month.

At the start of prototyping, teams come up with a "backlog", a list of all the tasks that need to be completed in order to launch a successful prototype. Then at the start of each cycle, a sub-set of tasks is selected from the backlog for implementation and this is what the team focuses on.

At the end of the cycle, the team reviews their progress, reflects on learning and starts again with another sub-set of tasks from the backlog. Such cycles continue until all tasks in the backlog are complete. At this point the prototype has been implemented.

✎ NOTES

0.14.2/ Processes - Waterfall Model (Don't Do It)

REQUIREMENTS

PRODUCT
REQUIREMENTS
DOCUMENT

DESIGN

SOFTWARE
ARCHITECTURE

IMPLEMENTATION

SOFTWARE

VERIFICATION

MAINTENANCE

X MONTHS

The Waterfall Model is an outdated design approach that originates in software development. It could be thought of as an approach characterized by "Big Design Up Front" where huge resources are poured into the development of a single solution. Traditionally, this was how software was developed. But as software grew increasingly complex, a new approach was needed due to the ineffectiveness of the Waterfall Model.

Looking beyond the world of software, we find that the Waterfall Model is prevalent in many other fields, particularly in addressing social challenges. It could be reduced to an acronym DIE (Design-Implement-Evaluate) taking place over many months of years as a linear, step-by-step process. The nature of complexity means that the Watefall Model and DIE approaches are generally unsuited to addressing complex social challenges leading to the risks of failure being extremely high (between 90%-100%).

✎ NOTES

0.14.3/ Processes - Theory U

DOWNLOADING

PERFORMING

OBSERVING

PROTOTYPING

OBSERVE

ACT

SENSING

CRYSTALLIZING

PRESENCING

RETREAT

At it's most basic the U-Process is a collective innovation process. It provides a structured process allowing a group of diverse people to come up with ideas in response to a challenge that can then be prototyped. The U-Process can be used as a core process for the Innovation Stack.
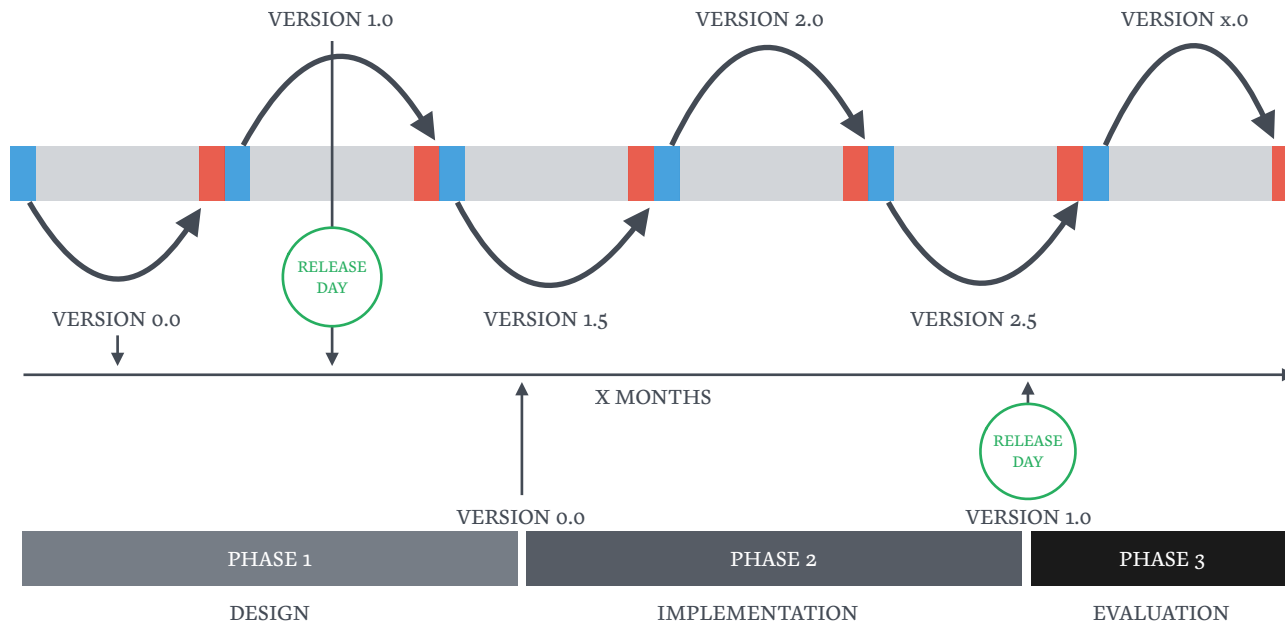
The ideas that emerge using the U-process are grounded in two things. Firstly a shared understanding of the situation or system that is the focus of change and secondly alignment at the personal level with the wider mission of the group.

A diverse group of actors with both a shared understanding and a collective will to change is a formidable asset in the work of changing complex systems.

✎ NOTES

0.14.4/ Processes - Prototyping Paradigm

PROTOTYPING PARADIGM

VERSION 1.0

VERSION 2.0

VERSION x.0

RELEASE DAY

VERSION 0.0

VERSION 1.5

VERSION 2.5

X MONTHS

RELEASE DAY

VERSION 0.0

VERSION 1.0

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3
DESIGN	IMPLEMENTATION	EVALUATION

PLANNING PARADIGM

The practice of prototyping sits at the heart of social labs. At its most basic to prototype means to test solutions as early as possible. In contrast to a prototyping process is a planning process such as the Waterfall Model.

With a traditional planning process we invest the bulk of our resources in a group of experts (designers, planners etc) to come up with a solution which is then implemented. With a prototyping process we support diverse groups of stakeholders to come up with responses, which are then tested as early as possible.

Prototyping as a method of problem solving requires a set of skills and attitudes that are very different to those demanded by traditional planning paradigms.

These skills and attitudes require us, as individuals, teams and institutions, to both unlearn old patterns and learn new ways of engaging with the world. Successful prototyping is dependent on transformation at both a personal and institutional level.

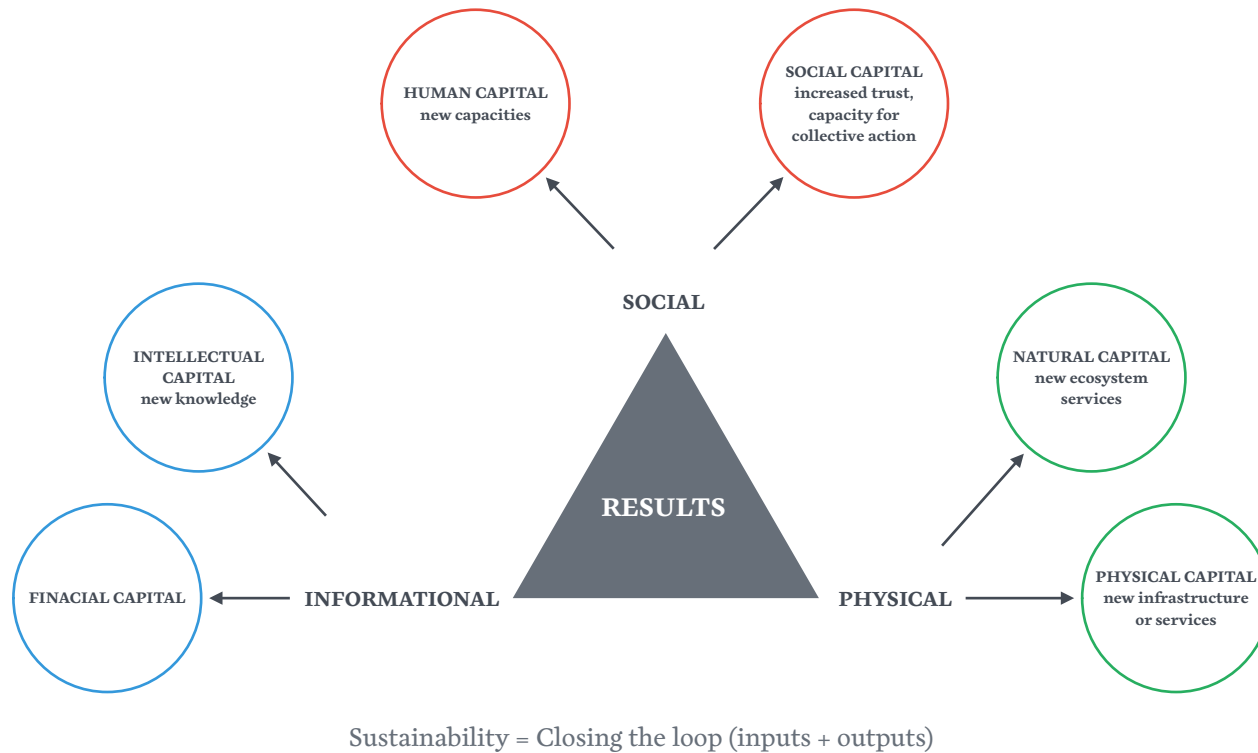**NOTES**

0.14.4/ Processes - Prototyping Paradigm
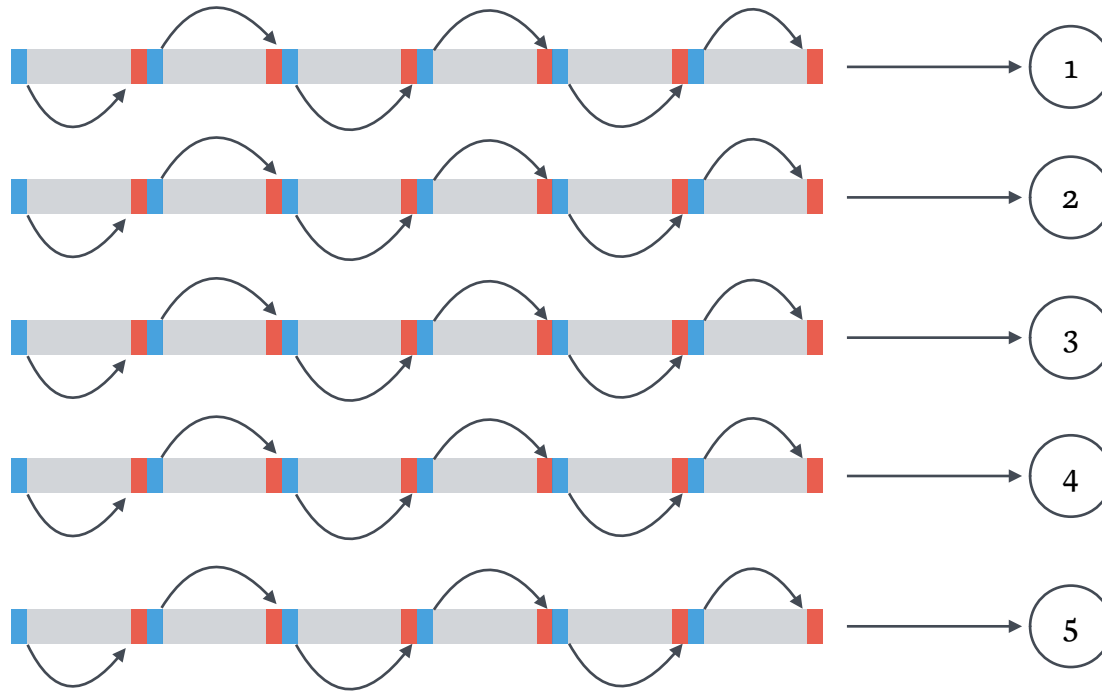
A successful prototyping programme is many times more effective than a comparable planning approach. Each prototype represents, a small experiment, a small bet as to what a successful solution might look like. In a planning based approach we make one big bet, which typically either works or does not.

With a prototyping-based approach we are taking an approach of systemic spread betting – we lay down a number of small bets as to what a successful solution might look like. If we can run multiple, parallel prototypes then the probability of finding a solution that works goes up dramatically.

✎ NOTES

0.15/ Results - Producing Multiple Capitals

HUMAN CAPITAL
new capacities

SOCIAL CAPITAL
increased trust,
capacity for
collective action

INTELLECTUAL
CAPITAL
new knowledge

NATURAL CAPITAL
new ecosystem
services

SOCIAL

RESULTS

FINACIAL CAPITAL

INFORMATIONAL

PHYSICAL

PHYSICAL CAPITAL
new infrastructure
or services

Sustainability = Closing the loop (inputs + outputs)

"The first results we sought to cocreate with the labs were what we called prototypes or initiatives. When implemented, these provided a new set of services to stakeholders on the ground and are new forms of physical capital (infrastructure). The second set of results we sought to create, relationships, were a form of social capital. The third set of results, capacities, were a form of human capital. Finally, all the experience and lessons from both designing and implementing these labs were a form of intellectual capital. The production of these different forms of capital contributes directly to preventing the collapse of social systems. John Michael Greer, in a paper entitled How Civilizations Fall: A Theory of Catabolic Collapse, outlines a theory that civilizations collapse because the productive capacities of a civilization fail "to meet maintenance requirements for existing capital."

Source: The Social Labs Revolution: A new approach to solving our most complex challenges - Zaid Hassan (Berret-Koehler 2014) For more information on multiple capitals see Background Paper for <Integrated Reporting> adopted by the Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC)
http://www.theiirc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/IR-Background-Paper-Capitals.pdf

✎ NOTES