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Curriculum for Social Innovation officer in Public Administration

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Social Innovation in Public Administration

Curriculum

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PART I – The Course

1. Basis to the Development

The goal of this course is to prepare and anchor the role of Social Innovation Officers within public administration across the European Union. This emerging role responds to a growing need for individuals who can connect strategic goals, community needs, and operational practice—translating complex challenges into collaborative, effective public solutions.

2. Origins of the Content

This course was developed in response to identified needs from a comprehensive Skills Gap Analysis and insights drawn from practical Social Innovation Case Studies across several European countries. These sources highlighted recurring challenges and capability gaps within public administration related to fostering social innovation. The course content was further enriched by material from a master's-level program designed by Laura Kromminga and taught since 2021 at the University of Bremen. This foundation ensures the course combines practical relevance with academic depth, tailored to support the evolving role of Social Innovation Officers in the public sector.

3. Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, the participant understands the role of the *Social Innovation Officer*—a function envisioned to bridge strategic goals, operational realities, and meaningful collaboration with citizens and partners. They are equipped to identify complex challenges, navigate institutional settings, and support innovation processes that align with public value.

4. Learning Process

This training follows a blended, modular learning process. It is designed for flexibility, so that learners can work through the content in a self-paced format, independently or in combination with trainer-led sessions.

The main content is hosted on the Moodle platform. Each module is structured to take approximately two hours to complete and consists of texts and checking questions. These questions are meant to support comprehension and reflection. Learners can complete them on their own or use them as discussion prompts when working in a group setting. The text is designed to be either read or to be used for short videos.

In addition to the online modules, learners are encouraged to work with the accompanying Workbook. The workbook includes exercises designed for application in the learners' own professional contexts. Depending on the depth of engagement, each workbook module will require between one to two hours of self-study.

Two additional resources support the learning experience:

A Case Study Bank, offering practical illustrations from across Europe.

A Further Reading List: with links to articles, tools, and recommended literature for deeper exploration. These are not required for course completion but allow learners to go further depending on their interests.

5. Learning Contents

The content of the curriculum is based on the following topics:

1. Social Innovation Theory
2. Social Transformation Theory
3. Tools and Methodology in SI
4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
5. Principles and practices of design for policy
6. Economic strength and the financial variable in social innovation projects
7. Labour, socioeconomic relations and social responsibility
8. Urban and rural regeneration: policies, projects and the environment.
9. Orienting public procurement to support social innovation

6. Learners Experience

This course offers a modular and flexible structure grounded in design thinking principles, guiding participants from problem exploration to solution development.

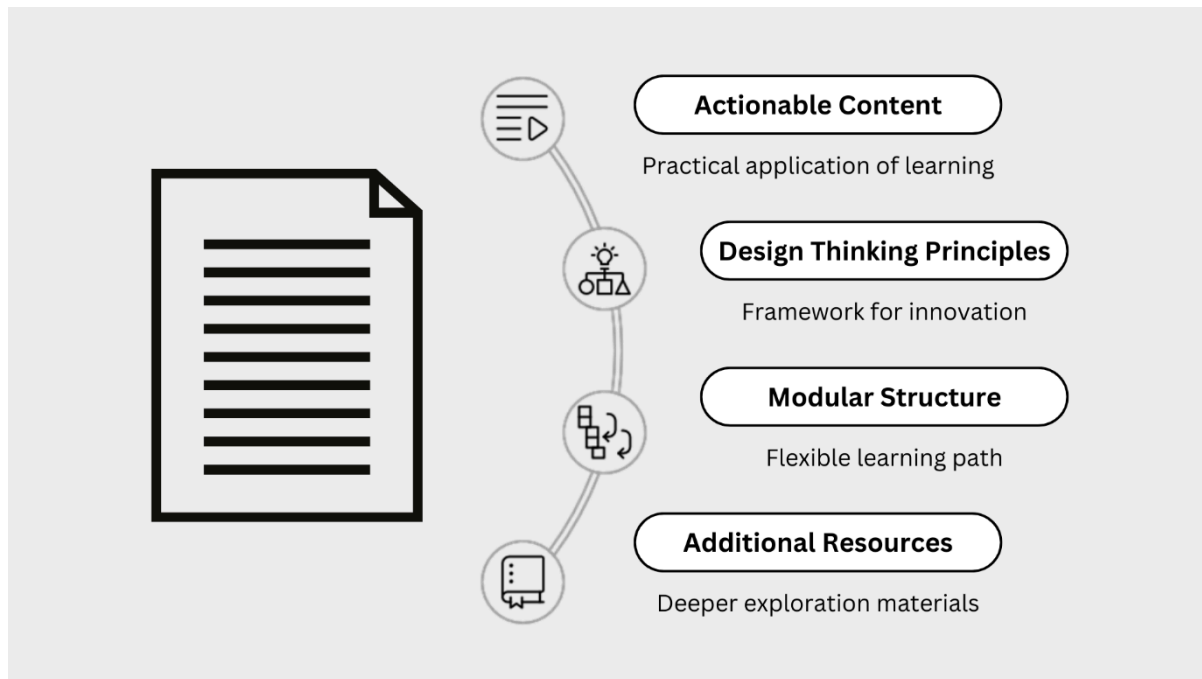


Figure 1 - Course Learning Structure

It emphasizes actionable content through practical exercises, real-world examples, and take-action elements that encourage immediate application. The design supports both structured learning and individual adaptation, allowing participants to engage based on their needs. Complementary resources such as a workbook and a case study bank, along with curated further reading, deepen the learning experience and support practical use in diverse settings.

The course is designed to offer a flexible and accessible learning journey that supports both immediate application and long-term reflection. Its **modular structure** allows learners to engage with the content at their own pace and according to their professional needs. While the modules follow a coherent sequence — from foundational concepts to advanced practice — they can also be used selectively, depending on the learner’s current challenges or interests.

A core strength of the course is its **practical orientation**. Each module includes actionable content such as examples, exercises, and “take action” elements that encourage direct application in the learner’s own work environment. This approach lowers the threshold for implementation, making it suitable even for learners without formal innovation roles or project funding.

To support deeper exploration, the course also includes a **“Further Reading”** section whenever appropriate within the module as well as at the beginning of the course. This curated material allows learners to expand their knowledge beyond the essentials, with a focus on trusted sources from research, practice, and international policy guidance.

The structure is grounded in principles of **design thinking**, encouraging learners to start from real-world user needs and iterate toward better solutions. The course does not promote a fixed model but rather equips learners to navigate uncertainty and adjust their approach over time. It follows the structure of design thinking: from problem exploration to synthesis and then to solution exploration to synthesis. The modules 2 and 3 explore the “problem” while modules 5 and 6 focus on the “solution” phase. The problem phase answers questions about *designing the right thing*, while the solution phase looks at *designing things right*. The phases are each divided into exploring and refining stages. In between and at the end, the modules 4 and 7 titled “take action”, encourages participants to firstly look at change management topics like leadership in personal contexts (module 4) and in an organisational setting (module 7). The module 8 focusses on topics around the process of innovating, touching upon topics of adjusting and viewing the innovation as a journey.

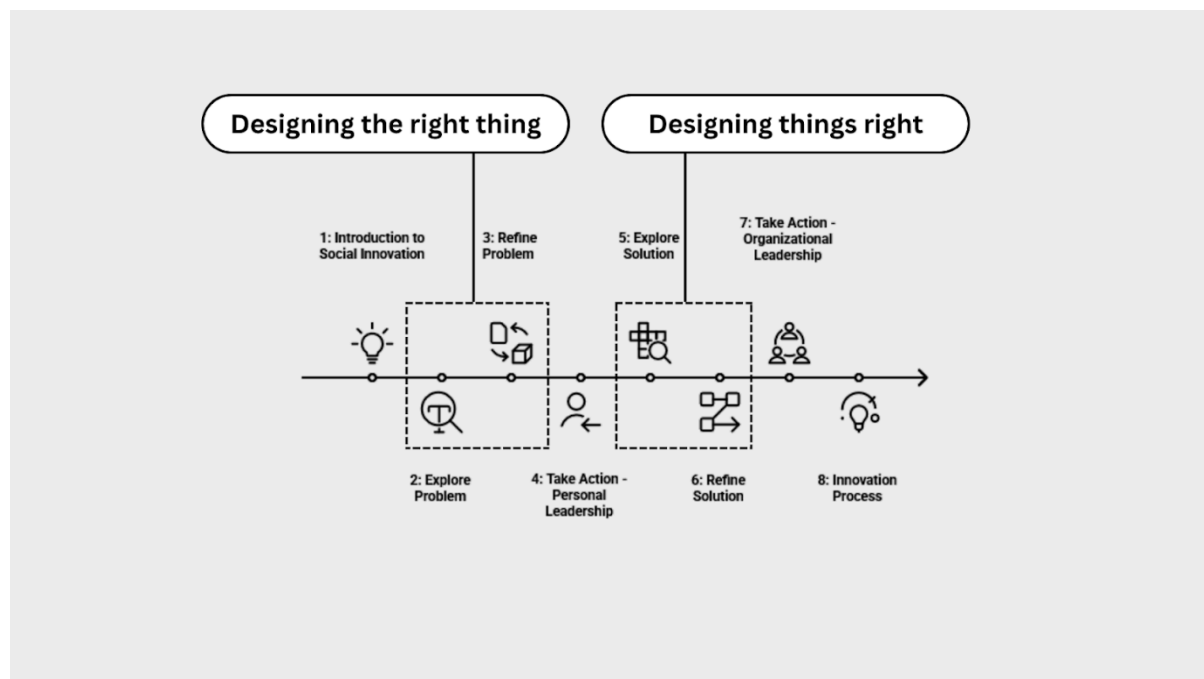


Figure 2 - Overview of the modules

In addition to the module texts, the course includes two complementary documents: A **Workbook** and a **Case Study Bank**. These are provided separately to ensure ease of use in different settings — for example, in workshops, team meetings, or strategic planning sessions. The modules contain short references to these resources, including check-in questions and brief mentions of relevant case studies, allowing the core material to stand on its own if learners are not using the additional documents.

Altogether, the course is designed to offer a balanced learning experience: structured but adaptable, grounded in practice, and supported by a range of tools that enable learners to translate ideas into action.

7. Trainer Guidelines

In order to guide participants through the content, there are skills and experiences a trainer should bring:

- Experience from within the public service: having lived experience will improve understanding and enable relationship building.
- Knowledge about applications of social innovation: being able to draw from a wide variety of applications, topics and past projects will help trainers bring in a practical example, no matter what background the participants are from.
- Skills as a coach, facilitator or trainer: connecting with participants, creating a positive learning environment and establishing a foundation of trust comes from both skill training and exposure to learning situations.

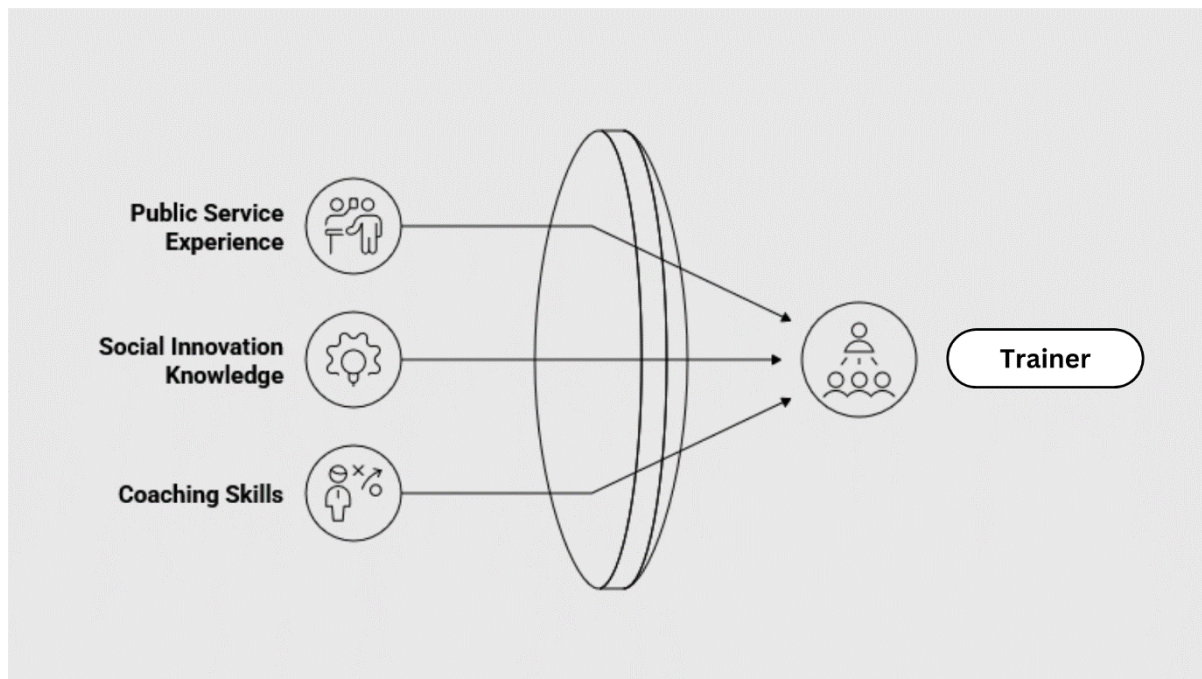


Figure 3 – Experiences needed for effective trainers

The training can be completed independently or with the support of a trainer or facilitator. Trainers are advised to:

- Use the Moodle content and the workbook directly. They should avoid preparing separate PowerPoint slides or extra theoretical materials.

- Trainers are welcome to enrich the course with local examples—especially those familiar to the participants. However, new content or theories should not be added. Trainers are invited to report any helpful examples via the feedback form so they can be included in future editions of the repository. This format ensures that the content remains cohesive while still allowing space for localisation and practical adaptation.
- Adapt to your audience: Use the modular structure flexibly. Depending on participants' experience levels, you can go deeper into some areas or skip others. The course is designed to work with both newcomers and experienced professionals.
- Encourage action, not just reflection: Many exercises are designed for direct application. Prompt participants to bring real-life challenges to the training and use the tools in their own context as early as possible. Especially in Modules 5 and 6, participants will be designing their own social innovation solutions. Be aware that they might want to skip the hard work of Problem Analysis in Modules 2 and 3 and will need encouragement to do so.
- Use the workbook and case studies selectively: These companion documents are intentionally separate for easier handling. You can integrate them into live sessions, assign them as pre- or post-session tasks, or offer them for optional deep dives.
- Create space for peer learning: Many modules include examples or exercises that work well in small groups. Use breakout discussions or paired work to encourage the exchange of perspectives. Try to create an atmosphere of trust among the participants, to open up real dialogue and sharing of real-life examples.
- Avoid overwhelming with theory: While the content is conceptually rich, the tone is kept accessible. Focus on clarity and simplicity, and use examples to ground abstract ideas. Since the modules are content heavy, start each session with a recap of the last, to make content better remembered.
- Emphasise iteration over perfection: Reinforce the idea that innovation is a process of learning and adapting, not about having all the answers from the start. Normalize trying, testing, adjusting — and sometimes letting go.

8. Further Reading

Core Frameworks and Method Guides

Papi-Thornton, D. (2016) *Tackling Heropreneurship: How to Do Good Without Being the Hero*. [PDF] Available at:
<https://tacklingheropreneurship.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/tackling-heropreneurship-daniela-papi-June2016.pdf>

Includes a practical framework on systemic roles such as convener, educator, gap filler, sharer, and systems-led leader.

Abercombie, Harries and Wharton (2015), *Systems Change: A Guide to What It Is and How to Do It*. [Online] Available at:
<https://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Systems-Change-How-to-Do-It.pdf>

A clear introduction to systems change, including practical guidance on boundaries.

Meadows, D. (1999) *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System*. [Online] Available at:
<https://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/>

A foundational text on systems thinking and why certain interventions (e.g. changing laws) may not be high-leverage.

Nesta (2021) *The Collective Intelligence Design Playbook*. [PDF] Available at:
https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta_Playbook_001_Web.pdf

Tools for using collective intelligence in innovation and decision-making.

Nesta (n.d.) *DIY Toolkit: Development Impact and You*. [Online] Available at:
<https://diy-toolkit.org/>

Useful tools including the Fast Idea Generator and Innovation Flowchart.

IDEO.org (n.d.) *Design Kit: Human-Centred Design Methods*. [Online] Available at:
<http://www.designkit.org/methods.html>

A practical guide to participatory and human-centered design for public innovation.

European Commission (n.d.) *Competence Centre on Foresight*. [Online] Available at:
https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/topic/futures-literacy_en

EU perspective on strategic, future-oriented and anticipatory culture in the EU policymaking process.

Books and Long Reads

Kahane, A. (2017) *Collaborating with the Enemy: How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust*. Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

A hands-on guide to navigating power imbalances and conflict in cross-sector collaboration.

Rayner, C. and Bonnici, F. (2021) *The Systems Work of Social Change: How to Harness Connection, Context, and Power to Cultivate Deep and Enduring Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

An in-depth exploration of how social transformation happens through local collaboration.

Rosling, H., Rosling, O. and Rosling Rönnlund, A. (2018) *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World – and Why Things Are Better Than You Think*. London: Sceptre.

A compelling perspective on bias, data interpretation, and mental models.

Available at: <https://www.gapminder.org/factfulness-book/>

Government and Policy Resources

OECD (n.d.) *Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) Case Studies*. [Online]

Available at: <https://oecd-opsi.org/>

An extensive repository of real-world innovation cases in public administration.

OECD (n.d.) *Public Sector Innovation Toolkit*. [Online] Available at:

<https://www.oecd.org/governance/innovative-government/toolkit/>

Covers methods for setting clear goals, monitoring, and embedding innovation.

Mazzucato, M. et al (n.d.) *Mission-Oriented Innovation Policy*. UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. [Online] Available at:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose>

On designing bold, outcome-driven missions for the public sector.

Nesta (2019) *Skills, Attitudes and Behaviours That Fuel Public Innovation:*

Competency Framework. [PDF] Available at:

https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta_CompetencyFramework_Guide_July2019.pdf

A framework for the human side of public sector innovation.

City Lab Berlin and Politics for Tomorrow (n.d.) *Public Service Design Handbook*.

[Online] Available at: <https://citylab-berlin.org/en/projects/handbuch/>

A German guidebook on participatory public service design.

Media and Visuals

Gapminder (n.d.) *One Dollar Street*. [Online] Available at:

<https://www.gapminder.org/dollar-street>

Visual tool for exploring global income and living conditions.

Veritasium (n.d.) *Game Theory: The Science of Strategy*. [Video] Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mScpHTli-kM>

An accessible explainer on strategic actor behaviour using game theory.

9. Definitions / Glossary

Term	Definition
Activity	Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources, are mobilised to produce specific outputs. (OECD, 2022)
Actors	Individuals, groups, or institutions with a stake in or influence on the problem or solution space (e.g. citizens, civil society, government bodies, businesses).
Beneficiary	The individuals, groups, or organisations, whether targeted or not, that benefit, directly or indirectly, from the intervention (OECD)¹¹ This does not have to be the same as the Target Group, although in some cases they are the same people.
Effectiveness	Quantifiable value that measures how well the delivered outputs contribute to achieving the intended societal impact.
Efficiency	Quantifiable value that expresses the relationship between the required input and the resulting output.
Goal	The higher-order objective to which an intervention is intended to contribute. Note: An example is the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (OECD, 2022)¹ In this Curriculum, a goal can also be a desired end state of input (e.g. cutting costs), activity (e.g. digitising a service), output (e.g. increasing number of delivered products) or efficiency.
Government	The elected and mandated political leadership responsible for setting policy direction and making decisions.
Grand Challenge	A complex, large-scale societal problem that requires cross-sector collaboration and long-term innovation (e.g. climate change, inequality). Note: This overlaps with Vision and is therefore not used in this course

¹ directly taken from the Glossary of the European Commission
<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/spaces/ExactExternalWiki/pages/50108900/Quick+Guide+Glossary>

Term	Definition
Impact	Impact tends to be the long-term change the action contributes to (at country, regional, sector level in terms of benefit to the population) (INTPA Companion 2022) Wider long-term consequences of a completed project or programme, such as socio-economic benefits for the population as a whole (Court of Auditors, 2024). The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects. Note: Impact addresses the ultimate significance and potentially transformative effects of the intervention. It seeks to identify social, environmental and economic effects of the intervention that are longer term or broader in scope than those already captured under the effectiveness criterion. Beyond the immediate results, impact seeks to capture the indirect, secondary and potential consequences of the intervention. It does so by examining the holistic and enduring changes in systems or norms, and potential effects on people's well-being, human rights, gender equality, and the environment.¹
Impact Logic Model	The causal sequence of an intervention that stipulates the different stages leading to the achievement of the desired objectives. In general, it starts with inputs, which then link to activities and outputs, and culminate in outcomes, and impacts. In some cases, reach is included as part of the results chain. (OECD, 2022) In other European Commission contexts, this is called a Results Chain¹
Input	The financial, human, material (in-kind), and institutional (including technological and information) resources used for the intervention. ¹
Intervention	A concrete solution such as a program, project, service, or regulatory measure intended to change a situation.
Mission	The clear, action-oriented purpose of an organisation or initiative; describes "what" is being done to move toward the vision.
Monitoring	A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main

Term	Definition
	stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds. ¹
Outcome	A short to medium-term change in the behaviour of the target groups and/or effects on the political, social, economic and/or environmental areas targeted by EU action – the action will contribute to change at this level (it is under its influence but not direct control).¹ Outcomes can be viewed towards the target group or the beneficiary group and need to be separated clearly. Outcomes outline a person's awareness, willingness or ability to change.
Output	Direct deliverables or benefits of activities - under the direct control of the action. (INTPA Companion, 2022) The products, capital goods and services that result from an intervention. Outputs may also include changes resulting from the intervention that contribute to the achievement of outcomes. Outputs include changes in knowledge, skills, or abilities produced by the activities. (OECD, 2022)¹
Project	Temporary set of coordinated activities to create a unique output within certain constraints such as time, cost, and quality. This generic term is often replaced in INTPA context by 'intervention'. ¹
Public Administration	The professional system and institutions responsible for implementing government policies and managing public services.
Social Innovation	Problem solving for society – introducing new responses to social needs that improve public outcomes.
Stakeholders	Agencies, organisations, groups or individuals who have a direct or indirect interest in the intervention or its monitoring and evaluation. (OECD, 2022) ¹
System	A regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole. (Merriam-Webster, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/system , accessed 10.10.2025)
Systemic Change	Systems thinking is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding how different parts of the systems relate to each other, how systems work and evolve over time and what

Term	Definition
	outcomes they produce. Systems change is an application of that thinking to real world situations. (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI), https://oecd-opsi.org/guide/systems-change/ , accessed 10.10.2025)
Target Group	The specific individuals, communities or organisations that the intervention is intended to reach (OECD, 2022) ¹ This does not have to be the same as the Beneficiary, although in some cases they are the same people.
Vision	A broad and aspirational picture of the desired future; the “why” behind your efforts.

PART II – Learning Contents in order of study

Module 1: Why Social Innovation and why this course

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Topics Covered

1. Social Innovation Theory
2. Social Transformation Theory
3. Tools and Methodology in SI

Topics Not Covered

4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
5. Principles and practices of design for policy
6. Economic strength and financial variable
7. Labour and social responsibility
8. Urban and rural regeneration
9. Public procurement

Learning objectives of Module 1

In Module 1, learners are introduced to the foundations of social innovation within public administration. The module clarifies the distinction between problems and solutions, and introduces the concept of internal versus external problems. Learners begin identifying their own levers for action and understand how trust, legitimacy, and impact goals shape public service. They explore how social innovation builds on—but moves beyond—traditional management tools like those from New Public Management. By the end of this module, learners will be equipped to frame social problems, understand their institutional role, and prepare for system-oriented, impact-driven innovation work.

Text content for moodle platform

1. Starting the course – why we are doing this

Welcome to this course on Social Innovation for public servants. You might already consider yourself a “Social Innovation Officer” or you might want to become one. In any case, this course helps you with methods, examples and the necessary theory background to strengthen your ability to assess and create social innovations.

This course is designed to allow for immediate implementation of the learned content, therefore it is accompanied by a workbook to try out the exercises. If you have a trainer or coach to help you, even better. If you do not, it might be helpful to check some of your exercises with peers, friends or colleagues. Sometimes, innovating can bring unexpected shifts in your mindset or routine. Please know that this is normal and might just require an outside view to help you unblock when “you can’t see the forest for the trees”.

Accompanying this course, you also have a range of Case Studies, that will give you useful information about Social Innovation in practice. There are two documents: one, where the cases are ordered by topics, and another, where cases are individual stand-alone.

You might already be driven by a deep sense of purpose or desire to increase the public benefit of your government. Citizens derive their faith in the institutions, depending on the interactions they have with the institution’s representatives. Therefore, this course will help you to investigate and change how that interaction is shaped and to relate to citizens in a new way. This takes courage, as it challenges the old ways and the “business as usual” mindset, that can run very deep in old institutions like public service.

Public sector social innovation goes beyond service improvement—it involves rethinking how systems operate to achieve more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable results. This includes changing how resources are distributed, how roles are assigned, how relationships are formed, and how rules and mindsets develop. These innovations shift how public institutions relate to citizens, how decisions are made and how public value is defined. Since many of these social innovations are rooted in a systemic vision – addressing not only immediate needs, but also the structural and cultural conditions that shape them – this course takes a systemic approach too, guiding you to innovate at the systems level.

Social Innovation is at the heart of re-defining and re-imagining government. It could not be said better than in the words of Disa Jironet, a Dutch Public Prosecutor and winner of the 2024 European Young Leaders competition: Let empathy, fuelled by courage, be our guiding force².

→ Watch the full video here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNxCVaHi8vA>

² Disa Jironet, State of Europe 2024, Building human institutions; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNxCVaHi8vA>

2. Creating Space for Reflection – A Missing Practice in Public Administration

Despite its role in stewarding complex societal systems, the public sector is notoriously bad at reflection. In many government contexts, the pace of work, the formality of hierarchy, and the pressure to deliver leave little space to pause and ask: Why do we do it this way? Who benefits? What's the actual problem?

This lack of reflection isn't just a cultural habit. It is embedded in institutional rhythms—election cycles, budget years, audit trails, and reporting requirements. Public servants are trained to execute plans, not to question premises. Politicians are trained to defend positions, not to sit with uncertainty. As a result, truly collaborative, diagnostic spaces—where administrators and political actors jointly explore what is happening in a system—are rare.

This is a challenge for any Social Innovation Officer. Without reflection, problem framing remains shallow. Without shared analysis, innovation efforts will lack legitimacy and traction. And without emotional safety, many colleagues will default to what they know—even if it no longer works.

Adding to this difficulty is the problem of distributed power: no single actor in public administration “owns” a system-level problem. Often, the people in charge of implementation are not those who framed the problem. Meanwhile, political leadership may have only a partial understanding of the context in which their policies are applied. This disconnect further limits reflective dialogue.

That's why modules like this—along with their exercises—can play a quiet but powerful role in change management. The problem tree, stakeholder map, and game theory analysis are not just tools for you to use individually. They are conversation tools—ways of opening reflection in teams that are otherwise frozen by habit or fear of critique.

You might encounter resistance when introducing these exercises. Some colleagues may see them as “theoretical,” “soft,” or “not our job.” But often, this resistance masks a deeper discomfort: the fear of confronting complexity, of losing control, or of admitting that one's existing work may be part of the problem.

To overcome this, treat your colleagues not as blockers, but as co-reflectors. Invite them in. Use shared language. Choose small, low-risk settings: a brown-bag lunch, a workshop, a cross-departmental meeting where people already feel somewhat safe. Use the tools to externalise the discussion—put the problem on paper, in the form of a map or diagram, so it feels less personal and more shared.

This is where change begins. Not with a big announcement or a bold innovation, but with a shift in how people think about their role, their assumptions, and the invisible systems they're part of.

Because in the end, reflection is not a luxury in public service. It is a democratic practice. And the more people you invite into it, the more your organisation will become capable of adaptive, systemic responses—not just reactive ones.

3. Connecting to the EU framework on Social Innovation

“Social Innovations are innovations that are social both in their ends and in their means. Specifically, we define social innovations as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations”. (Caulier-Grice, J.; Kahn, I.; Mulgan, G.; Pulford, L. and Vasconcelos, D. (2010) Study on Social innovation: a paper prepared by the Social innovation eXchange (SiX) and the young foundation for the Bureau of European Policy advisors. Young Foundation/European union)

The EU defines Social Innovation as “Social innovation involves the creation and implementation of new ideas, practices and policies designed to address social challenges and enhance the well-being of European citizens.”

The EU rounds the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) fund with the aim to support social innovation through several measures. This funding aims to develop, replicate and scale up innovative solutions.

In short, the act of “social innovating” means “problem solving for society”.

4. Definitions for this course

In order to get started, we firstly need to find a working definition for “Social Innovation in public administration” and the role of “officer”.

For this course, we define Social Innovation *within public administration* as innovations that are both social in their ends and in their means while showing up within government, within society or where government and society meet.

Another way of creating social innovation is to support a non-governmental social innovator, for example through government funding. Social innovations within government are limited to the government role and are therefore much more restricted than for example a business leader would be, which makes them smaller in nature. Yet they can potentially create a major change in the how governments create or deliver services, whom they involve and the legitimacy that government actors have within society.

The “officer” role might not be your official title or role. You might still use the tools described here to increase the societal positive impact of your official position within government. Depending on your role, you will have your individual use of the techniques described here and your personal levers to pull. Because of the huge variety of potential roles and the heterogenic nature of the public service in the EU, in this course, we will rather refer to levers. Your levers are defined as the actions you can take and the changes you can implement, large or small. The aim of this course

is also to show you, that there might be many more levers to pull, than you might expect.

4.1. Characteristics and Types of social innovation

There are several kinds of social innovations, with some interventions using multiple kinds at once: organisational innovation, service innovation, technological innovation, relational and cultural innovation.³

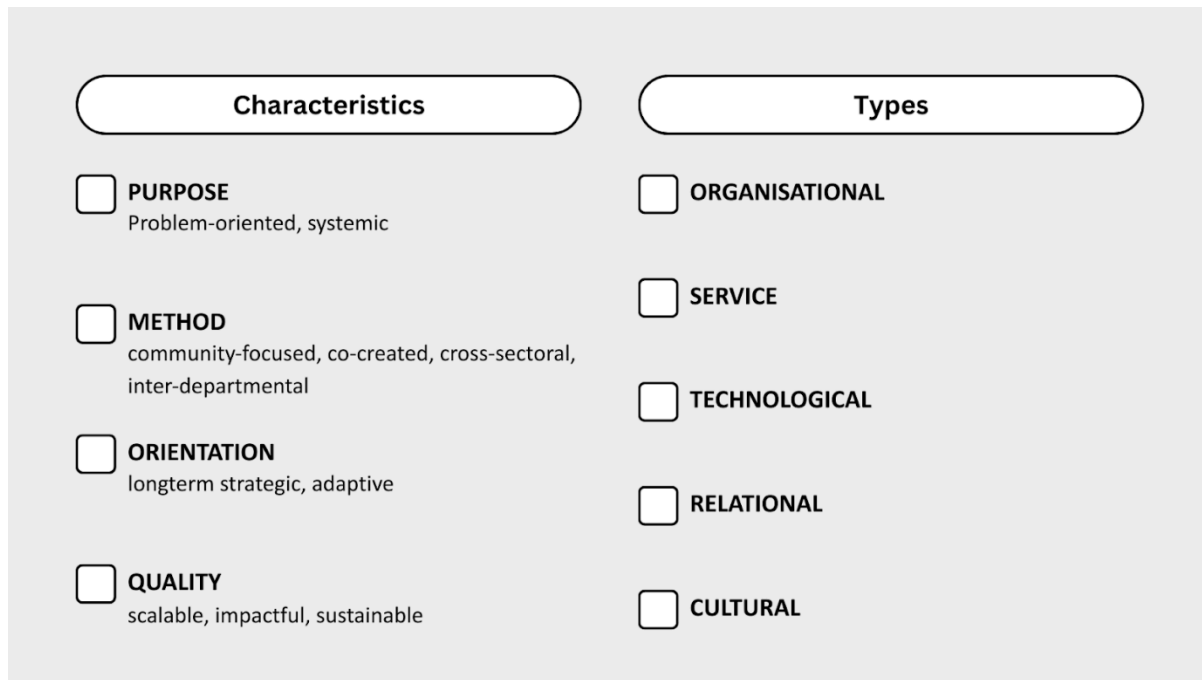


Figure 4 - Characteristics and types of social innovation

Service Innovation is novel or redesigned services, that improve accessibility, personalisation and efficiency. While the innovation sits at the output side of government, it can also mean changing the access to those services, how citizens can get involved in the design or delivery of those services or how the delivering entity does research into the root causes of the issue, before fully designing the solution.

Organisational innovation refers to “new forms of inter-institutional collaboration and hybrid governance models. This could be an entirely new entity, a network, a digital platform, an interregional or intersectoral cooperation or an initiative driven by one stakeholder to affect governance.

Technological innovation is most commonly known, and means the use of technology to innovate. The technology itself can be for example a digital platform, use of AI or other tools. From outside government you might know technological innovation like a TV, radio, phone, smart phone or self-driving car. Inside government

³ Social Innovation Practices

they might be connected to a direct service, but more often improve a service by collecting data, sharing data inside and outside government, connecting previously siloed services and generally making government services more efficient.

Relational and cultural innovation are new models of engagement and shifts in power dynamics between institutions and communities. There are two main ways of creating such innovation. On one hand, involve or empower those stakeholders, previously with less power, to share their views or take decisions. On the other hand, empowering communities to innovate, and open pathways to scale those innovations through a strong connection with the institutions.

5. Criteria to identify Social Innovation or Social Entrepreneurship

Social innovation and social entrepreneurship are often used interchangeably in everyday conversations—and that's understandable. Both terms suggest some form of mission-driven activity that creates social benefit. But they are not the same. Understanding the distinction is not just academic; it helps practitioners and public actors choose the right strategy and allocate support appropriately.

Social innovation refers to a novel approach to solving a social problem. It is about creating change in how systems operate, often through new policies, practices, relationships, or services. It may or may not be financially sustainable, and it can occur inside public institutions, communities, civil society, or even in informal groups. Its central aim is societal benefit, and the innovation lies in the approach—not necessarily the business model.

Social entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is about applying entrepreneurial practices to tackle social issues. It's often associated with financially self-sustaining ventures—organizations that use business methods to achieve social outcomes. However, not all social enterprises are innovative. Many replicate well-known solutions and apply them to new regions, target groups, or markets. That's valuable, but depending on the height of innovation, that is required – it might not be innovative enough.

Let's take a practical example. Imagine a city government launches a food sharing fridge initiative where surplus food from local businesses is made publicly accessible. This might be a social innovation, especially if public sector institutions haven't previously played a role in food distribution or food waste reduction. The solution creates new institutional relationships, addresses sustainability goals, and may change how people interact with municipal services. It does not need to generate revenue.

Now imagine a new café, which is run as a work integration social enterprise for people with disabilities. It uses a business model to provide stable employment and inclusive workplaces—a socially valuable approach. But if there are already dozens of such cafés in the region, it might not qualify as a social innovation. It's a social enterprise, but not necessarily doing something (very) novel.

5.1. The Social Enterprise Criteria Matrix

To navigate this complex landscape, especially in public administration where definitions shape funding and collaboration, it helps to use a practical framework.

In response to these blurred lines, a tool has been developed to help organizations, funders, and policymakers define social entrepreneurship on their own terms. Rather than enforcing a single definition, it enables users to identify what matters most in their own context. It consists of 11 criteria, grouped into four levels, and allows users to plot themselves across a spectrum of four levels. The criteria include topics such as innovation, financial independence, governance models, employee participation, and beneficiary engagement.

This is not about creating a new orthodoxy. On the contrary—it recognizes the diversity of actors working toward social good. You might value innovation highly but operate with low employee co-determination. Or you might focus on deep participation by beneficiaries without any financial revenue model. Both are valid paths and are made visible by using a shared framework with other social innovation or social enterprise actors.

Use it to:

- Reflect on your own or your institution's definition of social innovation and social enterprise
- Align with funders, partners, or beneficiaries on a shared understanding
- Communicate your approach more clearly—especially to people new to the field

→ Further Reading: and download of the full criteria matrix:

<https://www.laurakromminga.com/en/matrix>

6. Innovation as new enough

What is “new” enough, to count as an innovation, is a debate often found in the technological innovation space too. The analogy, by which you can distinguish innovation “height” and “spread” is the following: The height is the difference between the new and the old way of doing things. If your old smartphone had 2 cameras, and your new one has 3 cameras, the innovation height is low. Users will take pictures either way, and therefore their way of interacting with the device does not significantly change.

The “spread” looks at how many people in a defined group are using the innovation. If you work in a city, you might want to consider the first plastic-free supermarket an innovation, even if it already exists in your neighbouring city. But you might also consider them an innovation, until they take over as the “new normal”, requiring a different spread of the practice.

As mentioned above, innovating within government might be smaller than an external innovation, due to the public administrations limited ability to influence “what” is being done. Instead, public administration more often decided “how” something is done. For example, you might not be able to change that a specific funding program exists, but you might be able to decide to cut down the previously lengthy process, which was excluding people in rural areas from applying and receiving the funding.

In order to create a social innovation, you will be required to tackle a societal need, while the “height” or “spread” of the innovation is less important. In this course we will explore all ways to innovate – both large and small.

7. Society Needs as the basis for Social Innovation

“Problem solving for society” implies that you as a public servant, or the government in general, are responsible to “fix” a certain problem. Taking a look into the history of governments and government responsibilities reveals a major shift in what the population regards as a responsibility of the ruling class. While times of monarchies did not require the king or queen to take the opinion of ordinary people into account (very much), modern democracies place a particular importance on citizens opinions. In the end, this opinion shapes elections and therefore the rule of the country.

7.1. Government responsibilities

Taking healthcare as an example, the public healthcare system has only been implemented in the 19th and 20th century, with the first public health insurance introduced in 1883 by Otto von Bismarck in Germany⁴. Today, many citizens take it for granted that “keeping the citizens healthy” falls within the responsibilities of public health insurances and the ministries of healthcare. You can observe other needs, which have a long history of falling into government responsibilities, like transportation and infrastructure or education. Other society needs might be recognised in one European country, but not the other, or they might fall into the scope of government responsibility or out of scope between elections. Societal needs that flip-flop between government attention and government neglect are the ones often discussed in media. Here you can observe that the process of creating a majority of the population in support of government responsibility is still forming. It is still undecided if, in the long-run, this societal need will be placed with government or not. If this is true for a societal need that you personally care about, you might want to use this course with particular attention to how the government internal and external debates are going and where you can find examples where government programs did get involved to build a case for government involvement. By building a case from an example, you might be able to show and persuade actors to place this societal need more firmly into the bounds of government responsibility.

⁴ Bundesministerium für Gesundheit,
<https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/themen/krankenversicherung/grundprinzipien/geschichte.html>

The social needs addressed most often in Social Innovation are:

- employment and economic participation
- health and wellbeing
- civic engagement and participation
- sustainability and urban regeneration.

While the individual solutions may target regionally specific needs, the overarching commonality is, that solutions often address both service delivery gaps and governance failures → **further reading: Case Study Bank.**

7.2. Society Needs shifting

Another important factor around society needs is their ever-shifting nature. There are issues as old as humankind, like housing and food supply. As Rutger Bregman puts it (Bregman, Utopia for Realists, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2017) the oldest issues are humans fighting hunger, illness and death. Of course, these issues have taken different forms during human history and fighting hunger does not look the same today, as it did 100 or even 1000 years ago. It might not be same between European countries or even cities and rural areas within the same country.

Today, there are emerging societal needs like smartphone addiction, that have not even been researched or understood fully. To the previous point, without this understanding they also are not recognised within society widely enough to place this issue within government responsibility yet. They might in the future. The example of smartphone addiction is a particularly interesting one, since it broadly falls within healthcare, which most people do recognise as a government responsibility. Some countries have issued laws to limit the use of smartphones for specific age groups or places like schools, making use of the government's ability of regulate behaviour through laws. Other discussions include screening social media content, which is a high contributor to smartphone addiction or to offer counselling or therapy support to address addiction. The array of solutions is wide and many government and non-government entities are trying different approaches: from straight "outlawing" to softer methods like counselling. Time will tell which approaches are the most impactful and if more governments will take this societal need onboard.

Future societal needs might arise, which threaten lives or livelihood of people. They might stem from technology, which we do not yet have discovered, or from other changes in the environment like droughts and the subsequent displacement of people. Observing those changes and what people or specific groups of people need to lead a health, full and content life is part of creating government services that help people to create that life.

→ **Further Reading:** To help you stay on track with trends, a trend map can help to track shifts in social and cultural norms. Marcie Parkhurst, Hallie Preskill, Guide to Trend Mapping, <https://www.fsg.org/resource/guide-trend-mapping/>

7.3. Governments losing trust

In Module 1, we distinguish between “problem” and “solution,” with a focus on identifying not only external challenges but also internal issues within public administration. The OECD highlights that public trust is both a policy objective and a key enabler of effective governance (OECD, 2017⁵). Even internal projects—like IT reforms—can and should aim for impact goals such as improving transparency, reliability, or service culture. These internal improvements become levers for rebuilding trust, especially when they signal responsiveness and competence. By reframing internal problems through an impact lens, public servants align technical work with broader societal value. In this module, learners will begin to identify such problems and connect them to meaningful, measurable outcomes.

→ Further Reading: OECD (2017). *Trust and Public Policy: How Better Governance Can Help Rebuild Public Trust*

https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2017/03/trust-and-public-policy_g1q74ea6/9789264268920-en.pdf

8. Problem and Solution distinction

In order to identify what type of situation you are looking at, we need to distinguish between problem and solution. The problem, which you would like to resolve as a social innovator, might be a societal one, for example elderly people suffering from loneliness. It might be a government internal problem, like lacking digital skills among public servants.

We will distinguish between “external” and “internal” problems, meaning those happening for a specific group in society and those within government, hindering an efficient, agile, user friendly government (you could insert more criteria here).

8.1. External problems

An external problem, as mentioned above, might be a healthcare, education or new problem like smartphone addiction. These problems have a clear target group, there might be academic research, experts, non-government actors and citizen representatives, who are trying to understand and tackle this issue. If your government role is involved with type of external problem, you will find it easier to describe it and create a social innovation through this course.

Social innovators within government share a common ethos of a deep sense of public responsibility. They often develop their solutions in a participatory and proactive way, while showing decisiveness and giving direction. The leadership style they display emphasises the importance of building trust, aligning values and fostering a sense of shared purpose among teams and other stakeholders.

8.2. Internal problems

⁵ OECD (2017). *Trust and Public Policy: How Better Governance Can Help Rebuild Public Trust*. OECD Publishing, Paris

On the other hand, you might want to work on a purely “government internal” problem, to which you cannot formulate any societal group. This problem might be connected to internal workings like digitalisation of government internal processes, hiring and retaining talent, leadership training within government or the like. An example for a social innovation to tackle an internal problem could be a new collaboration between government departments or federal levels. These problems do have their validity, and they can be addressed through social innovation solutions. Yet, they have a different nature to external problems, because they do not serve a specific and distinct group of citizens. If these problems get resolved, they serve citizens as a whole, making government services less expensive (therefore saving taxes), faster, more accessible or more user friendly. You could probably continue this list with your own definition of a “good” government. The ultimate societal objective, solving an internal problem, is a functioning democracy. The base of a functioning democracy are functional democratic institutions, that deliver the output that is needed and wanted, while creating trust into the institutions themselves. Therefore, the societal goal here is trust – this goal does not change and is shared by all innovations that seek to address internal problems within government. This societal goal is more abstract than i.e. “a city with climate-friendly mobility for everyone”, but it works just as well.

9. Goals and Impact Goals

Before any problem – internal or external – can be addressed, it is important to get a clear understanding of the goals involved. There are multiple levels of goals, which become important to sort before exploring solutions. Governments are faced with many requests, sometimes formed as goals, from political figures, the public or other interest groups. They can range from: Save money, you are spending too much tax money! To you need to become more cost-effective! To You need to create more benefit for the homeless!

The target we are aiming at in this course is primarily an external impact goal. That means, there is a clear distinction made towards other goals. This does not mean they are not valid – because spending less taxes on something might be a very valid goal of your organisation. However, maximising impact shifts the focus towards the impact goal, while not denying that other goals exist and might even take priority at times.

→ For the full explanation of the Impact logic model see Module 6

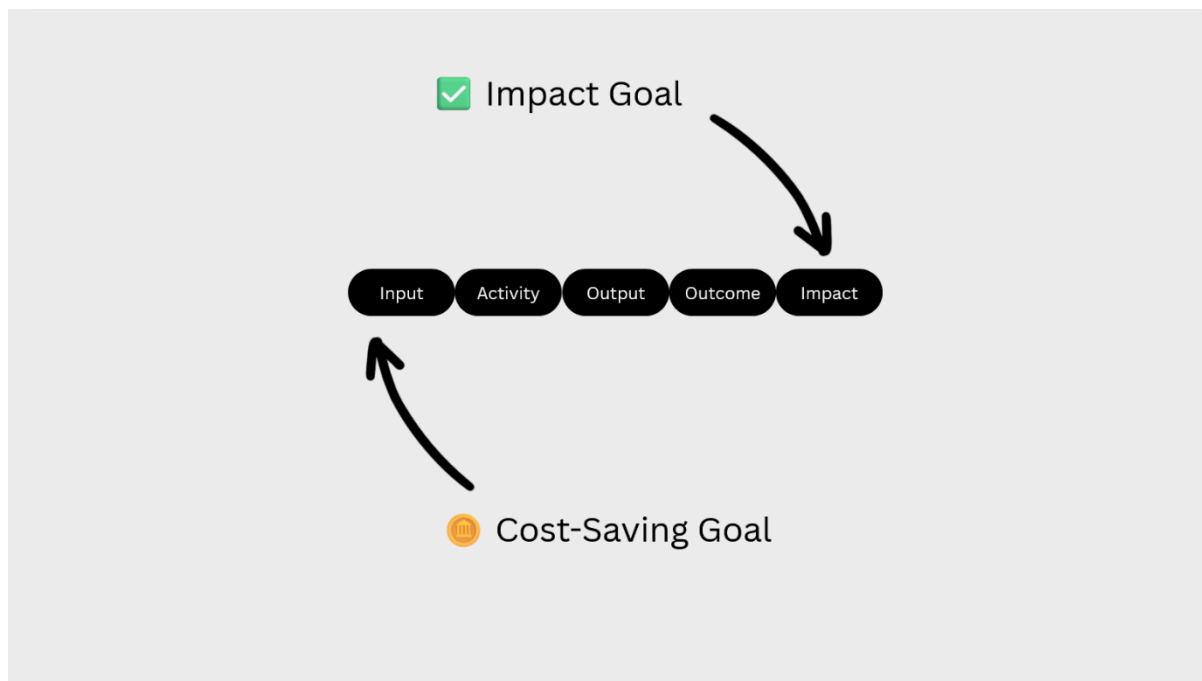


Figure 5 - Cost-saving goal vs. Impact Goal (own illustration)

10. Beneficiary and Target Group

The basis for social innovation is being able to specify a group of people within society, who should benefit from your intervention. In impact measurement and management this group is most often called “beneficiary”. It might also be called “target group”, also depending on the local language. For the purpose of this course, we will use the word beneficiary distinctively from the word target group as follows:

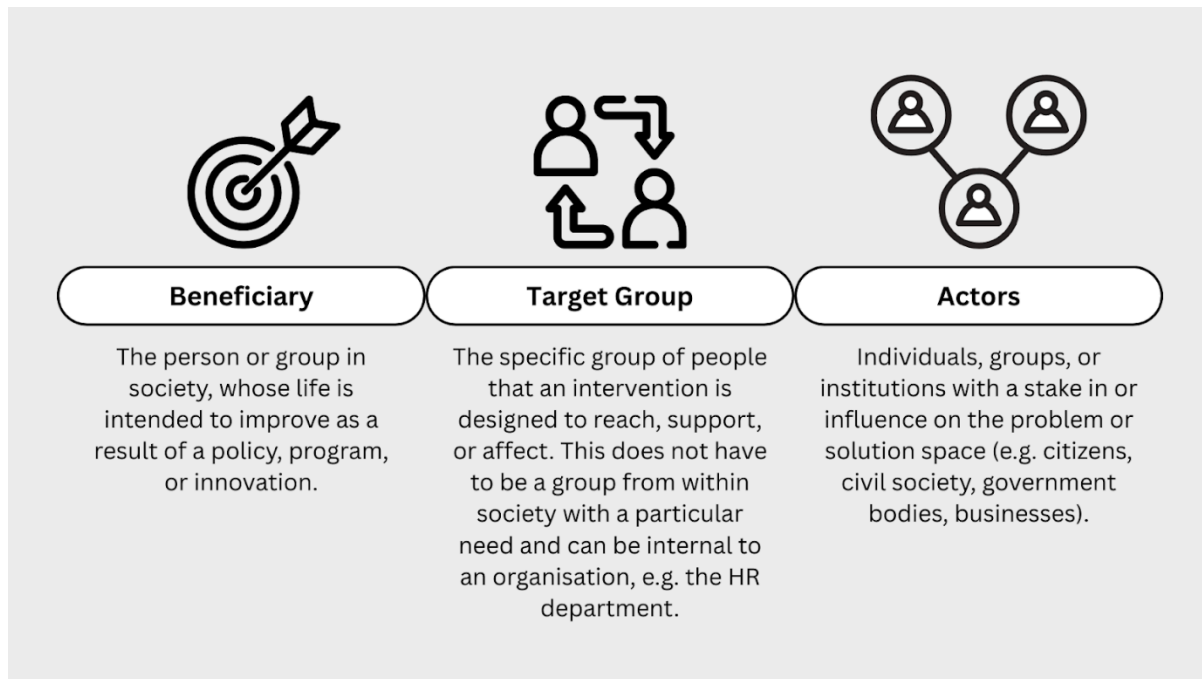


Figure 6 - Definitions of Beneficiary, Target Group and Actors

For example: In a program designed to improve Youth Unemployment, a potential solution could be to train teachers in schools to become job coaches. This intervention has the target group “teacher”, while maintaining the beneficiary “young adults”.

The groups can be difficult to distinguish, because in some cases the beneficiary is the same as the target group.

For example: Another approach for Youth Unemployment could be a training program to help young adults to write job applications and train for job interviews. This solution maintains the beneficiary “young adult” but changes the target group – here the young adults are also the target group.

A target group most often is a stakeholder, who has very close contact to the beneficiary like parents to children or teachers to students. Some solutions are designed to address them, because they become multipliers – one teacher reaching many students – and therefore making the solution easier to scale.

Other actors, whom you might need to implement the solution effectively are simply called “actors” during this course. These are stakeholders, for example suppliers to implement the solution like a software or training company, whom you hire to do the teacher training. Actors come in many shapes and forms and can play different roles, like approving a budget or setting legal standards that can help or hinder your solution.

Depending on your role as a Social Innovator, you can come up with different interventions, that require you to work with different people. The milestones and

steps to implement your solution “target” different people, for example you need the city council to approve a new budget or you need the IT departments cooperation for a new software. Many Social Innovations within governments target fellow public servants. It is important to keep the terms separate and transparent to avoid confusing them with the beneficiaries in society.

After all, all Social Innovations are social in their aim. Therefore, the beneficiary group needs to be defined within society. The target group of the intervention however can be a different stakeholder group, who needs to behave differently to allow the innovation to happen.

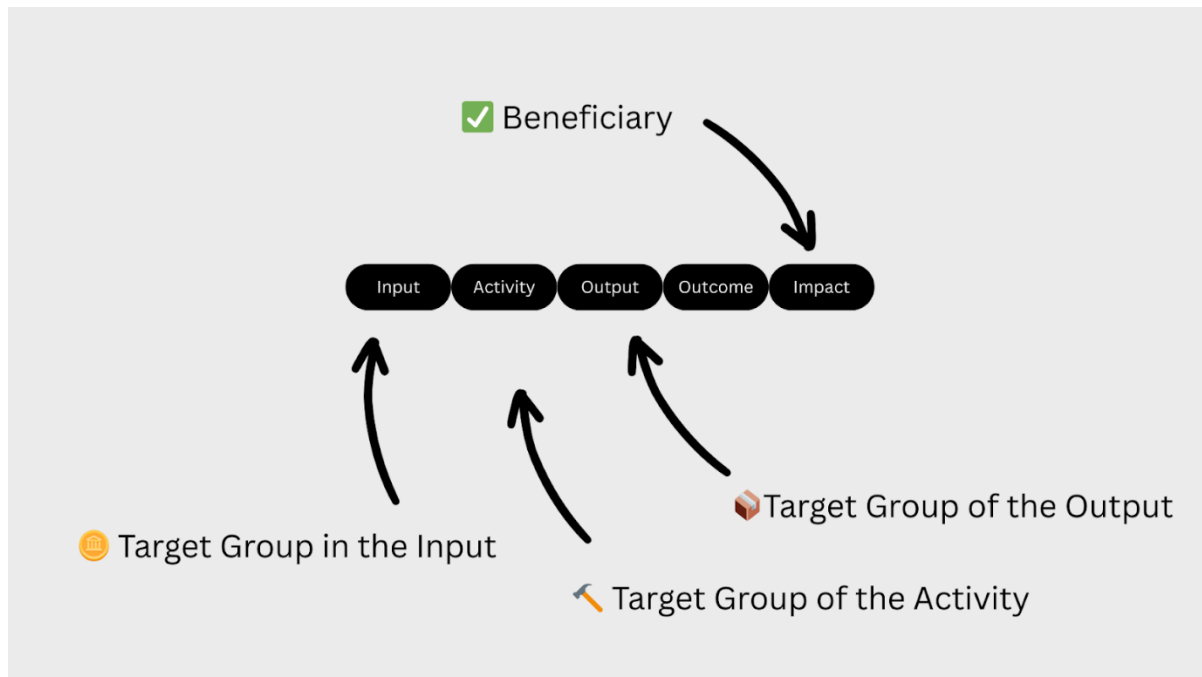


Figure 7 - Beneficiary vs. Target Group (own illustration)

11. Cynefin Method

After we have identified your impact goal, we can start analysing it. We use the Cynefin method to do so and will get to know more methods in the following modules. The Cynefin method allows us to distinguish into four general types of problems: simple, complicated, complex and chaotic. Depending on the problem, the best course of action can be determined – for example in a flooding of the city (a chaotic situation) a crisis team might be a good course of action, while the implementation of a new IT system (a complicated problem) you can consult experts and do a SWOT analysis (to identify your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). We will come back to this exercise later.

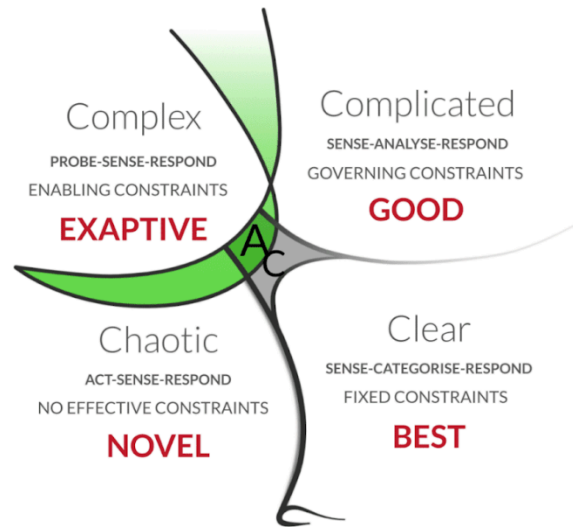


Figure 8 - The Cynefin Method⁶

12. Levers in government

The levers, which you can use as a public servant, largely stem from your official role. But, as mentioned above, you might have many more options, which are more of informal nature. For example, if you work in a department in charge of procurement processes, you might be able to make new procurement processes which use quality criteria around climate change. You might also influence, what training around procurement gets done, spreading the knowledge around climate-adapted procurement among colleagues. In the end, you will find that your lever is a “how” things get done instead of a “what” gets done. This is due to the roles of public servants versus politicians, and we will therefore focus here more on the space of “how things are done”. You will see, that there is a lot of room to innovate in the margins.

After we have identified your goal and target group, and taken a look at the problem, we can add your levers and finally take a look at the social innovations, which are available to you. This will serve us as a basis for the following course. Of course, you can always come back and adapt, what you have written here. Your lever can come from the traditional angle of government levers: distribution of funds, regulation or information. On the other hand, you can derive your levers from looking at what you do and how you do it, specifically looking at what choices you have in the “how”. For

⁶ Dave Snowden,
<https://thecynefin.co/about-us/about-cynefin-framework/?srsId=AfmBOoo2t3VL9TJ-rUSAt6bwT4GIUKFIAppUk3YcWyhVioEp6Tw5wwKy>

example, you might be able to invite more stakeholders to meeting, might add information into a report or start hosting team meetings differently. All of these are low on the innovation spectrum, but can be powerful tools.

12.1. Integrating with political leadership

In order to keep this course on track, we will focus on the side of government which implements (Public Administration) and will not include the side that decides on the direction of government work (Politics). There are of course many overlaps, for example in the writing of new laws where the direction might come from politics and the input (or even final text) can come from public administration. Generally, in this course, we will focus more on the “how” interventions are done, rather than on “what” is chosen as an appropriate intervention in the first place. This distinction is necessary, because most public servants cannot or only in minor ways influence what is chosen as an intervention. Most often the limitations are given, both from current political programs, laws or budget constraints. There will be notes in the exercises, where you might choose to dive deeper in the case that do can influence the “what”. If not otherwise noted, we will focus on the “how” (>Needs assessment).

While social innovation within public administration can tackle external or internal problems, with the goal to create changes for the public good, whatever is done will likely be highly linked to the political leadership of the government entity. While social innovation in politics is not part of this course, it is relevant to draw the boundary more exactly, as public service and politics interact.

The standard policy cycle is: agenda-setting, formulation, decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and termination or adjustment⁷. This cycle is much more theoretic and less used as such in practice, but can inform us where the theory and the social innovation practice link together. It shows us two main interaction points, where you might encounter hinderances or find support for your social innovation: The planning phase and the adjusting phase. While in the planning, political leadership might seek to understand what has previously been tried, you can use the methods from this course to map what indicatives have been the most impactful and which should be continued. You can also showcase what new initiatives should be tried, as you will find methods here to plan a new intervention. In the adjusting phase, where the political leadership might seek to understand the impact or the effectiveness of the tried solutions, you can use methods like impact measurement, which is part of one of the later modules in the course.

In any case the political leadership needs to be involve at some point during the creation of the social innovation – either in opening possibilities for new actions to be taken, i.e. by agreeing to a new budget, or by adjusting existing programs or projects to evidence, collected by the public administration during the implementation.

⁷ Howlett, M., Ramesh, M., & Perl, A. (2009). *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

13. What is not social innovation

To avoid any potential mix-up, here is a number of things that are not “Social Innovation”: Social Work, as done by people in non-governmental agencies, hospitals or education institutions. While this work, of course, is very valuable and social in nature, it is only one field of addressing a societal need. If you wish to explore social innovation in the field of social work, you might find that measuring which services are the most impactful an interesting topic to explore.

Social Innovation also does not equal social entrepreneurship. A social enterprise in the EU definition⁸:

“A social enterprise is an operator in the social economy whose main objective is to have a social impact rather than make a profit for their owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion and uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives. It is managed in an open and responsible manner and, in particular, involves employees, consumers and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities.”

While this definition points at the social enterprises addressing a societal need and they often are innovative, in many countries they are not required to be innovative. Social Enterprises also are enterprises, meaning they have some form of a business model, selling goods or services to earn income. A Social Innovation is not required to lead to a business case.

14. Links to other fields of government modernisation

New Public Management (NPM) became a prominent reform agenda in public administration from the 1980s onward. It was developed in response to the perceived inefficiencies of traditional bureaucracies and aimed to make public institutions more effective by borrowing practices from the private sector. Leading voices in this movement, such as Christopher Hood, introduced the term to describe a broad shift: public sector management should focus more on results, decentralisation, performance measurement, and customer orientation.

The broader political context of the time—especially in the UK, the US, Australia, and New Zealand—favoured shrinking the state, increasing competition, and introducing market mechanisms into public services. NPM placed a strong emphasis on efficiency, measurable outputs, and managerial autonomy. Over time, it led to widespread reforms, including outsourcing, target setting, and performance-based budgeting.

One of the key ideas within NPM was impact orientation. Public administrations were encouraged to define goals, measure performance, and demonstrate value for money. In that sense, impact orientation has a long history and is already deeply

⁸ European Commission:

https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy/social-economy-eu/social-enterprises_en

embedded in many management tools and practices used across government today. This is important to note: social innovation in public administration does not start from scratch. Many useful tools for steering toward societal outcomes—such as performance indicators, impact logic model, and strategic planning—are already in place. They can be revisited and built upon to support more ambitious, socially oriented innovation efforts.

At the same time, NPM also faced strong criticism. Over time, it became clear that many of the reforms delivered limited results or even backfired. In some cases, efficiency gains came at the cost of trust, participation, or long-term learning. The overuse of market logic sometimes undermined public values and fragmented governance. Complex societal problems often could not be solved through isolated performance targets or narrow output measures. Many countries eventually stepped back from the most rigid forms of NPM, recognising the need for a more flexible, system-oriented, and participatory approach.

This is where social innovation in public administration offers a promising evolution. Like NPM, it focuses on improving public institutions and aligning them more closely with societal goals. But it goes further by highlighting systemic interconnections, recognising the role of citizens as co-creators, and framing impact as something that includes social value, not just efficiency. While both approaches seek to steer change toward public benefit, social innovation shifts the focus from “better management” to “better outcomes for people and society.”

Therefore, you might want to explore the legacy of impact-oriented public management in your own contexts. Many government departments already use monitoring frameworks, strategic outcome goals, or budgeting tools that can serve as starting points.

The shortcomings of past reform efforts can also help avoid repeating common mistakes. For example, focusing solely on metrics can lead to blind spots, while ignoring the organisational culture or political context can block lasting change. Social innovation aims to integrate these dimensions—management, participation, and adaptability—into a more resilient approach to reform.

In this way, we can see social innovation as the next chapter in a longer journey: building on what has worked in public management, but expanding the definition of success to include not only performance, but also trust, inclusion, and meaningful change.

→ *Further Reading: Mieke van der Bijl-Brouwer, Bridget Malcolm: Systemic Design Principles in Social Innovation: A Study of Expert Practices and Design Rationales, 2019, Tongji University and Tongji University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2020.06.001>*

Module 2: Problem Basics – Exploring

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Topics Covered

- 2. Social Transformation Theory
- 3. Tools and Methodology in SI
- 5. Principles and practices of design for policy

Topics Not Covered

- 1. Social Innovation Theory
- 4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
- 6. Economic strength and financial variable
- 7. Labour and social responsibility
- 8. Urban and rural regeneration
- 9. Public procurement

Learning objectives of Module 2

Before any effective solution can be designed, the problem must be properly understood. In public administration, however, there is often pressure to act quickly—resulting in symptoms being mistaken for root causes, or internal challenges being treated as societal ones. Module 2 supports participants in developing a clear and systemic understanding of the issue at hand, using structured tools such as the problem tree and framing techniques.

Participants will learn how to distinguish structural, behavioural, and cultural causes, and how to define a societal target group affected by the issue. Rather than rushing to predefined answers, the focus is on asking the right questions. Tools like tension framing and role reflection help participants work across silos, anticipate resistance, and strengthen their position as legitimate contributors to public value creation.

Framing problems well is not only a matter of accuracy—it is a form of leadership. This module builds foundational skills for any public servant seeking to advance change that is collaborative, systemic, and aligned with the actual needs of society.

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1. Problem Framing Techniques

Before we dive into tools like the problem tree or root cause analysis, there's a step that is both subtle and foundational: how you frame the problem in the first place.

In public administration, it is easy to confuse a problem with its symptoms—or worse, with a solution already in mind. For example, when we say “we need more digital citizen services,” we are already implying a certain direction of change. But what is the actual issue behind that? Is it that people don't trust public offices? That access is limited due to working hours or geography? That existing services don't match evolving needs? Framing helps you return to the deeper question behind the surface demand.

Framing a problem is about exploring its full dimensions before narrowing it down. The goal is to clarify what is truly at stake—socially, systemically, and from the perspective of those affected. Often, what sounds like a problem is actually one version of a much wider system of challenges. This is where reframing becomes essential: the art of deliberately shifting your perspective on the problem to reveal new levers for action.

One powerful technique for this is turning a problem statement into a “how might we” question. This open-ended format forces you to strip away assumptions about solutions. Instead of stating, “we need an app for job seekers,” you might ask: “How might we support young people to navigate the job market with confidence?” The latter invites a range of solutions—some digital, others personal or structural. It broadens your scope without losing focus.

Another useful lens is tension framing: looking at the conflicting needs or perspectives within the system. For instance, imagine a city government trying to reduce car traffic while maintaining the support of local businesses that rely on deliveries. Framing the problem as a tension—between mobility innovation and commercial dependency—opens the space for compromise and creativity. It also shows respect for the realities of all involved, which is key to building trust and legitimacy in public innovation.

Framing also requires clarity about whose perspective you are prioritizing. A policy problem might look very different from the viewpoint of a citizen, a frontline worker, or a finance officer. A well-framed problem statement often integrates these views, or at least acknowledges them. It becomes a shared anchor point for collaboration.

Lastly, good framing avoids language that implies blame, urgency without reflection, or inevitability. Terms like “crisis,” “failure,” or “lagging behind” can heighten pressure without improving clarity. Instead, choose language that opens inquiry. What's changing? Who is affected? What matters most? What is uncertain or contested?

Problem framing is not a step to rush through. It is the foundation for everything that follows in your analysis and design process. Taking the time to craft a thoughtful, inclusive, and flexible problem frame will save you time later—and significantly increase the chances that your social innovation effort will hit the mark.

→ Further Reading: This study investigates how five public and social innovation agencies adapted and used the core design practice of *problem framing* to address complex problems in society – Mieke van der Bijl-Brouwer: Problem Framing Expertise in Public and Social Innovation, 2019, Tongji University and Tongji University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2019.01.003>

0. Understanding societal needs and actors involved

We have started, by putting the problem into one of four different types from simple to chaotic. We will now get to know one of the most common methods for identifying root causes of a problem: the problem tree.

2.1. Problem Tree Method

The problem tree symbolises the causes (in the roots) and the effects (in the crown) of a current status-quo situation. It helps you to write and re-write your problem statement (the trunk of the tree), until it is precise and has a well-formulated beneficiary.

By connecting the roots and the branches, you can show how causes and effects are linked. The main two benefits of this exercise are distinguishing between causes and effects, and finalising your problem statement. While we begin with writing down the problem statement into the trunk, we then fill in the root causes and then subsequently the branches of the tree.

For example: if the local youth struggle to enter the job market, one root cause could be that the preparation in school is lacking because the school curriculum does not include job trainings. Therefore, the problem in the trunk could be: Local Youth cannot find an entry-level job. One root could be, that schools do not include life skills into their curriculum.

The exercise will help you to work with your existing problem statement and see, whether you have chosen a statement that truly hits. You will notice that root causes or effects could themselves be problem statements. In that case, you can switch the statement from the tree trunk for a root cause statement or effect statement instead.

The problem tree exercise also helps you to make sure the problem involves a societal group. One of the most common mistakes, working in an organisation as large as the government, is to focus on an internal problem. This might be, because digitalisation is getting a lot of political attention and your task is to implement software to increase efficiency internally. While these internal changes are worth looking at, and we will do so later in the course, they do not constitute a societal

problem. If you find that your problem tree has an internal problem in the trunk, you should look into the crown of the tree, identifying those effects involving citizens or companies, who are suffering because of the issue. By completing the problem tree exercise, we will make sure that you can identify a problem statement with a true beneficiary, which must be a group outside of government.

2.2. Questions to differentiate beneficiary from target group

However, you might find that the translation into your own context can create confusion. For example, in Germany the term “beneficiary” is most often translated into “Zielgruppe”, which can also stand for “target group”. By using this term, the beneficiaries might be lumped into the same category as the targeted audience, creating problems in the analysis.

For example, the political leadership in a city decides to increase the cities attractiveness for youth by offering services to help people between the ages of 16 and 20 to find a job. There are existing services, for example a 4-week job coaching, but the booking process requires a visit to the municipal offices. Therefore, rather than adding to the program, the new decision is to digitalise the booking process, making it more attractive and reaching more people. While the beneficiaries are the youth and will be the youth in the future, the target group of the intervention is the IT department of the city and the office responsible for the planning of the program. Keeping these people separate is important for the impact measurement process, for example for the Outcome measurement to target the change in behaviour and the change in satisfaction of the youth, rather than that of the IT department employees.

The best question to identify your beneficiary is: *Who benefits from our work (in the long run)?* This might not be the intervention, which you are currently adding (like the digital booking platform), but the service itself that is being delivered. Additionally, to the beneficiary, you might want to define a target group of your intervention by asking: *Who needs to work with us, in order to realise the potential of this intervention?*

The beneficiary might be identified by age, gender or other characteristics. The populations most often targeted are youth (ages 14 to 35), vulnerable populations and the general citizenry. In the case of the general citizenry being the beneficiary, the impact goal is most often to improve quality of life for all citizens, to improve the quality of the public administration in general or to (re-) build trust into democratic institutions.

For example, the platform gov.gr in Greece is a national digital platform, providing over 1.500 public services. It improves the accessibility for all citizens to those services, while not changing the impact of those services per se. The platform, as an innovation, targets the general citizenry, improving their access to services and therefore the trust into the delivering institutions. The improvement of life, which a

citizen gets from the service itself, is not necessarily changed by the digitalisation of the process. Yet the innovation serves the society in a different way, by building trust into democracy. → [Further Reading in the Case Study about gov.gr](#)

0. Not All Causes Are the Same

When analysing problems in public administration, one of the biggest challenges is choosing the right tool or intervention. That choice becomes much easier once you understand one key idea: not all causes are created equal.

Some problems are deeply embedded in policies or laws. Others emerge from day-to-day behaviour—habits, choices, or lack of incentives. Still others are shaped by culture: beliefs, values, and social norms that subtly guide what people see as possible or acceptable.

These three types—structural, behavioural, and cultural—often overlap and reinforce each other. Yet distinguishing them can help you sharpen your analysis, choose the right entry point, and collaborate with the right actors.

Understanding the type of cause behind a problem helps you choose your tools more wisely. A law can't fix a cultural stigma. A workshop can't rewrite procurement law. A co-creation event may fail if behaviour is constrained by fear of blame.

As a Social Innovation Officer, your job is not just to “fix” problems, but to navigate systems wisely. When analysing any challenge, ask yourself: *What part of this is structural? What is behavioural? What is cultural?* Only then can you intervene where it matters most—and make your innovation stick.

3.1. Structural Causes

Structural causes are baked into the system—they include laws, regulations, organizational rules, and funding mechanisms. They are often formalized and hard to change quickly, but they also offer the clearest opportunities for institutional reform.

Example: A city cannot offer multi-annual funding for youth programs because national procurement law only allows one-year contracts. Even if everyone agrees the current system isn't working, the structure itself locks the problem in.

Structural causes tend to require legal reform, new mandates, or formal partnerships. You'll likely need political will and administrative support to address them.

3.2. Behavioural Causes

Behavioural causes are about how people act—and why. They might follow incentives, habits, convenience, or fears. Even in well-structured systems, poor behaviour patterns can lead to dysfunction.

Example: A well-funded job support program for youth exists, but uptake is low because users don't trust institutions or find the registration process confusing. The structure is in place, but the behaviour doesn't follow.

To address behavioural causes, interventions often include user-centred design, nudging, communication strategies, or aligning incentives with desired outcomes.

3.3.Cultural Causes

Cultural causes are the most invisible—and sometimes the most powerful. They involve shared beliefs, social norms, values, and taboos that define what's "normal," what's "possible," and what's "off-limits." They are embedded in language, history, and emotion.

Example: In some contexts, asking for public assistance is associated with shame. Even if programs are accessible and useful, people may avoid them due to cultural stigma. In another example, collaboration across departments may be seen as a threat to authority rather than an opportunity.

Cultural causes can't be changed overnight. But by recognizing them, naming them, and gradually introducing new narratives or shared learning experiences, you begin to shift what is considered legitimate or acceptable.

0. Why Role Awareness Matters

In public administration, people often assume their job description defines their influence. But systems leadership is not about titles—it's about conscious positioning. You may be an IT lead who convenes cross-departmental co-creation. Or a youth policy advisor who fills a strategic gap by introducing mentorship models.

Understanding your role helps in three ways:

- **Clarity of Contribution:** You focus on what you can change—not what's out of reach.
- **Partnership Building:** When you know your role, it's easier to see who complements you.
- **Avoiding Hero Syndrome:** You shift from "solving the problem" to "serving the system."

Before launching any initiative, ask yourself: What role does this system need right now? And how can I play it well?

That reflection could be the difference between a project that delivers outputs—and one that catalyses real, lasting change.

0. Mapping System Symptoms and Identifying Reform Needs

Social Innovation in public administration doesn't begin with a solution—it begins with a deep reading of the system's pain points. Often, systems are already trying to reform themselves. Yet even with resources, motivation, and political attention, things do not change. In these situations, what is missing is not necessarily goodwill—it is alignment and structure. Now you will start to identify symptoms of malfunction in your system and trace them back to missing building blocks of reform.

Let's begin with a simple diagnostic: imagine a social innovation issue—such as high youth unemployment—even after various projects, public-private partnerships, and strategy papers. If the problem persists, the question is: which part of the system reform effort is missing?

A helpful framework is to assess whether the following five components are present and aligned:

- A clear, shared goal – Is there agreement across government departments and partners on what success looks like? Is the goal linked to an impact outcome?
- Capacity – Do all actors involved have the skills, time, and resources to contribute effectively?
- An action plan – Are there timelines, milestones, and sequencing of interventions? Is there clarity on “who does what”?
- Resources – Are funding and staffing in place? Are they flexible enough to allow for adaptive learning?
- Incentives – Why would each actor care about the change? What's in it for them?

If one or more of these five elements is missing, the system often displays recognizable symptoms, such as:

- Repeated failed starts: Several initiatives are launched but never fully implemented.
- Anxiety or blame: Public discourse blames specific groups or departments.
- Fragmentation: Efforts are uncoordinated; different actors pull in opposite directions.
- Resistance or stalling: Bureaucratic inertia is high, with decision-making avoided or endlessly delayed.

	Skills	Action Plan	Resources	Incentives	= Confusion
Goal		Action Plan	Resources	Incentives	= Fear
Goal	Skills		Resources	Incentives	= False Start
Goal	Skills	Action Plan		Incentives	= Frustration
Goal	Skills	Action Plan	Resources		= Small Steps
Goal	Skills	Action Plan	Resources	Incentives	= Desired Change
What is missing in your context:					

Figure 9 - Holistic Reform Model⁹

Mapping these symptoms is a powerful tool. It turns abstract feelings like “something’s wrong” into tangible, fixable issues. For example, if initiatives keep stalling at the implementation stage, it may signal that the action plan or incentive alignment is lacking—not that the problem is unsolvable.

To start using this analysis:

- Take one issue you have worked on or are planning to address.
- Write down observed system behaviours: confusion, repetition, friction, etc.
- Cross-check these symptoms with the five missing elements listed above.
- Identify where the true bottleneck lies.

Often, reform does not require starting from scratch. Instead, adding a missing ingredient—like a stronger communication strategy to create shared vision, or additional capacity-building for frontline workers—can unstick the system.

0. Finding what is missing from the system

Public institutions increasingly act not as sole providers but as conveners and coordinators of broader innovation networks. The ecosystem of actors around public administration becomes then more important to analyse, before developing any new solution. The constellation of stakeholders contributes to the open innovation

⁹ based on: Motorola University, Horvath, Stabsstelle BW für Verwaltungsreform, Qualitätsmanagement, Stuttgart 1999

character of public sector social innovation, in which public sector innovators recognise actors, their role, and try to map out their own role according to the system they find.

When attempting to bring about change within the public sector, one of the most overlooked questions is also one of the most powerful: What role am I playing in this system?

As a Social Innovation Officer, you are rarely the only actor involved in a societal problem—and you are unlikely to solve it alone. Social challenges like youth unemployment, environmental degradation, or civic disengagement exist within complex systems of actors, policies, behaviours, and incentives. That's why systems thinking is central to social innovation. But beyond understanding the system, understanding your position within it is equally crucial.

6.1. Driving Change with Systems Led Roles

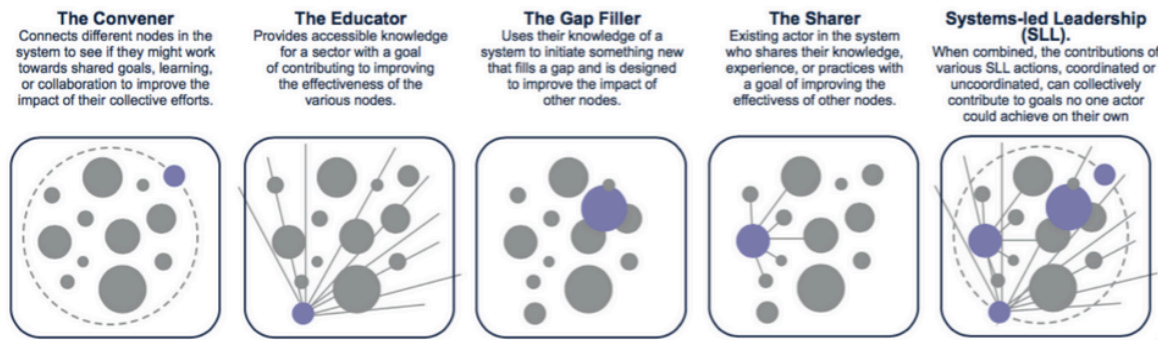
Daniela Papi-Thornton, a thought leader in systems change education, outlines five core roles that changemakers can take when addressing complex problems. This is a fresh perspective on how to create an overview of actors as a stakeholder map.

The roles include:

- **The Convener**
You bring people together. Your strength lies in building coalitions, hosting dialogues, and creating space for shared understanding. Public administrators as conveners can align stakeholders from across government departments, civil society, and business.
- **The Educator**
You share knowledge. This could mean informing citizens, building staff capacity, or translating complex data into actionable insights. Educators help others see the bigger picture—and their role in it.
- **The Gap Filler**
You identify and address what's missing. If a crucial service, resource, or connection is absent, you step in to prototype or advocate for it. This is especially relevant in public service innovation where structural gaps often stall progress.
- **The Sharer**
You open access. Whether through data transparency, toolkits, or replicable methods, you make what you know available to others—amplifying impact and trust.
- **The Systems-Led Leader**
This role ties them all together. You work with the system, not against it. You don't aim to "fix" people or impose external solutions, but to strengthen the

system's ability to self-correct and evolve. You enable collaboration, champion systemic diagnostics, and shift incentives over time.

Models for Solving Systemic Problems



Daniela Papi-Thornton 2018

Figure 10 - Systems Led Leadership Roles¹⁰

→ Further Reading: To read more about how to “apprentice with a problem” the following guide helps innovators (in this case start-up founders) to move towards a systems-led leadership role: Daniela Papi-Thornton, Tackling Heropreneurship, <https://tacklingheropreneurship.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/tackling-heropreneurship-daniela-papi-June2016.pdf>

0. Quick Decision Guide: Which Tool to Use When

After this chapter, you might be wondering which tool to use when. Use the workbook exercises and the following guiding principles:

- If your problem is unclear → start with 5 Whys
- If actors are unclear → use stakeholder map
- If a solution is imposed → analyse the assumed problem or goals involved

¹⁰ Daniela Papi, 2018,
<https://de.slideshare.net/slideshow/systemsled-leadership-daniela-papithornton-2018-german-webinar/102450443>

Module 3: Problem Advanced – Synthesising

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Topics Covered

- 3. Tools and Methodology in SI
- 5. Principles and practices of design for policy
- 9. Public procurement

Topics Not Covered

- 1. Social Innovation Theory
- 2. Social Transformation Theory
- 4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
- 6. Economic strength and financial variable
- 7. Labour and social responsibility
- 8. Urban and rural regeneration

Learning objectives of Module 3

In Module 3, learners develop the ability to consciously define system boundaries when analysing complex public problems. They learn how the scope of a system directly shapes how a problem is perceived and which solutions are considered feasible. Participants explore how budgets, laws, and mental models act as structural constraints or enablers. The module also introduces methods to uncover assumptions, biases, and hidden stakeholder incentives, drawing from evidence-based policy, requirements engineering, and game theory. This prepares learners to engage more effectively with complex, systemic challenges and supports them in designing interventions that are better aligned with long-term transformation goals.

Text content for moodle platform

1. System Boundaries – Matching System Scope to the Nature of the Problem

Understanding systems is at the heart of problem analysis in public administration. But systems aren't absolute—they're defined. And how we define the system we are analysing directly affects how we frame the problem and which tools we apply to understand it.

Let's say you are tasked with repairing a leaking school roof. On its own, this sounds like a straightforward technical problem: identify the leak, assign a budget, and repair it. According to the Cynefin framework, this might be a simple problem—there are clear cause-effect relationships and established best practices.

But what if the roof is just one symptom of a wider issue? Perhaps the school is in a district that suffers from underfunding, where multiple schools report similar maintenance problems, and the responsible agency is caught in a bureaucratic loop. Suddenly, the roof becomes a doorway into a much larger, complex problem—the state of public infrastructure in the school system.

This illustrates how defining the system boundary matters. If your boundary is “the roof,” you solve a technical task. If your boundary is “the school,” you may identify broader issues of planning and management. If your boundary is “regional education infrastructure,” your analysis will need to engage with politics, finance, and long-term policy.

As a Social Innovation Officer, your job is not to automatically expand every boundary. Rather, your task is to make conscious, intentional decisions about where the boundary lies for the specific analysis at hand. If you define a system too narrowly, you risk missing root causes. If you define it too broadly, you might become overwhelmed and fail to act.

System boundaries also interact with problem types. Often, problems that look simple within a narrow boundary become complex when viewed as part of a broader system. For example, “youth are not attending vocational training” may appear behavioural at first—until you realize the issue stems from systemic underinvestment, cultural expectations, and lack of accessible transport, making it a deeply interconnected system problem.

Practically, setting system boundaries involves:

- Asking: What actors, processes, and policies influence this problem?
- Mapping: Where does the influence start and end?
- Testing: Does narrowing or expanding the boundary change the nature of the problem?

Try to avoid falling into the trap of using administrative jurisdictions (e.g., “just my department”) as your only boundary. Think about the flow of decisions, funding, services, and social experience across agencies and sectors.

In short, defining the system is one of your most powerful tools as an analyst. It frames how problems are seen—and thus how they can be solved. Just like a microscope or a telescope, the way you focus your lens determines what you can see.

Two system boundaries can heavily influence how you set your system boundaries. While it is not advised to choose your system solely on their influence, budgets and laws can create useful boundaries, particularly if your official role is connected to them and you therefore have more influence in these areas. Existing Budgets and Laws can hinder innovation from both the private sector as well as the third sector. Acting as a Social Innovation Officer can reduce those barriers and help other stakeholders to innovate.

1.1. Budget as a boundary

The public budgets are the second most impactful boundary, which can be tempting to define system boundaries. Some public budgets are structured in a way that they already contain the intended impact goal, for example when the SDGs are used in the budget. Yet, this is not the case everywhere.

If your official role is involved in the budget cycle (e.g. approving money, or checking spending reviews), this system boundary is appropriate for your function. For example, if your role is to check procurement spending, you could formulate quality criteria within your procurement process, which then are used alongside your financial criteria to buy goods or services. Your impact goal can inform you, which quality criteria to choose.

1.2. Law as a boundary

We have already mentioned that laws can heavily influence what solutions can be implemented. One example are social protection laws, which often concretely detail what government services exist and who has access to them. Often, they are so detailed, that this creates problems in and of itself.

An example on how laws limit innovation come from Germany, where it was necessary to install a "light machine" on a bicycle until 2013 (see STVO §67), meaning a dynamo. While battery powered lights existed as a technological innovation for a number of years already, the law had not caught up until that year. Any light source, battery powered or otherwise, is a solution to make a cyclist visible to car drivers and prevent crashes or injury. The law was subsequently changed to include battery powered lights. However, if there are new technical solutions in the future, the law will again need to change. An innovative way of formulating laws is to include the intended impact. In this case "bicycles need to be visible". By offering such a

statement, which does not indicate any concrete solution, innovation truly becomes possible.

Similarly, legal and regulatory rigidity can block innovation. In Romania and Italy, municipalities faced barriers because national law prohibited multi-annual funding. The Project Center Timișoara had to push for a change to OG 51/1998 to secure funding for cultural projects. Other municipalities faced procurement barriers when trying to introduce collaborative or hybrid governance models.

→ Further Reading: Check the Case Study for the Project Center in Timișoara

2. Surfacing the Invisible — Assumptions and Mental Models

You can have the best data and still reach the wrong conclusion—if you’re operating under flawed assumptions. These mental models, or deeply held beliefs about how the world works, are often invisible yet highly influential. In government work, they shape policy priorities, organisational design, communication strategies, and resistance to change.

For example, a program designed to “activate the unemployed” assumes that people are out of work due to a lack of motivation or skills. But what if the real barrier is discrimination, lack of childcare, or regional economic collapse? The mental model directs both diagnosis and intervention. If left unexamined, it reinforces outdated narratives and misses the systemic nature of the problem.

These assumptions can also live in forms, KPIs, budget codes, and technologies. A digital portal that only works in German implicitly assumes everyone is fluent in the language. A success metric focused on “number of people placed in jobs” assumes all jobs are equal and ignores sustainability or satisfaction.

As a Social Innovation Officer, one of your most powerful roles is to surface and test these assumptions before jumping to solutions. A useful tool is the question: “What would have to be true for this strategy to work?” This prompts stakeholders to unpack their beliefs and test them against real-world data.

Other tools include:

- Stakeholder interviews focused on implicit reasoning
- “Reverse assumptions” exercises (what if the opposite were true?)
- Cross-case comparisons (what’s different elsewhere—and why?)

Mental models are not “bad” in themselves—they help people make sense of complexity. But when they become rigid or outdated, they create blind spots that block innovation.

Surfacing assumptions doesn’t require conflict. It requires curiosity, humility, and structured dialogue. Your job is not to convince others they’re wrong, but to open

space for shared exploration: *“What if we’re all a little wrong? And what could we learn if we asked a better question?”*

3. Bias – Seeing Clearly in Distorted Systems

Humans are not objective by default. In public administration—where complex issues intersect with diverse perspectives—our biases shape how problems are perceived, defined, and addressed. As social innovation officers, recognising bias is not about shaming others; it's about exposing the blind spots in systems.

When working on problems that affect vulnerable or marginalized populations, we must go beyond good intentions. Social Innovation Officers have the responsibility—and the opportunity—to examine the mental filters through which we perceive these groups. Too often, innovation is blocked not by lack of ideas or data, but by bias: both personal and systemic.

Hans Rosling's book *Factfulness* provides a powerful lens for understanding how our worldview becomes distorted. He identifies common instincts—like the gap instinct (the tendency to divide the world into rich vs. poor, modern vs. backward), the negativity instinct, and the blame instinct—that skew how we interpret data and human behaviour. These instincts aren't malicious; they are cognitive shortcuts. But when applied to vulnerable groups, they can reinforce stereotypes and blind us to real needs.

Imagine a city project aiming to increase healthcare access for migrant women. Policymakers might assume language is the primary barrier. They build a translation app. But during implementation, they discover that trust in institutions and fear of legal consequences play a much larger role. The innovation failed not because the idea was flawed, but because the assumptions behind it were untested.

This is not just a design flaw—it's a bias blind spot.

Bias also enters through data gaps. If your problem analysis is based only on statistical averages, you will miss the experiences of people who are undocumented, homeless, digitally excluded, or otherwise “invisible” to formal systems. Rosling warns against making conclusions from partial datasets. The most pressing problems often lie not in what's visible, but in what's omitted.

Another bias comes from institutional roles. Public servants often assume that “we are the helpers” and “they are the helped.” This binary creates a distance that distorts empathy and makes it harder to co-create meaningful solutions. Vulnerable groups may be treated as passive recipients rather than active agents who shape their environments, resist constraints, and innovate informally.

To counteract these tendencies, problem analysis must be grounded in real engagement. That means going beyond user surveys. It means listening without assuming. It may involve working with community intermediaries who hold trust

where institutions do not. And it often involves confronting the reality that we, too, are part of the system producing the problem.

This work is uncomfortable—but essential. Bias, once acknowledged, becomes a powerful diagnostic tool. If multiple actors in your stakeholder map are avoiding a certain population, or applying simplistic solutions, that pattern is worth examining. It may be a sign of fear, fatigue, or unconscious assumptions.

To be effective in serving vulnerable groups, we must cultivate humility. Rosling writes, “It’s better to be informed by curiosity than certainty.” That’s not just a scientific principle—it’s a social innovation mindset.

Ask not only “What does this group need?” but “What are we not seeing?” Not just “How can we help?” but “What assumptions are shaping our actions?”

Clear vision requires honest reflection. And systems won’t change if we can’t see them clearly.

Working on your biases and the biases of others around you will help you on the path of evidence-based decision making. The field of “evidence-based policy making” might be interesting to you, if you want to dive deeper into this topic. Also see Module 6 for impact measuring as a concrete tool to create evidence on impact.

→ Further Reading: To dive deeper into Evidence based policy making: Brian W. Head, Toward More “Evidence-Informed” Policy Making?
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/puar.12475>

4. Strategic Actor Thinking – Using Game Theory to Understand Stakeholder Behaviour

One of the most underused tools in public sector problem analysis is strategic thinking—not in the sense of long-term planning, but in understanding how different actors behave in relation to one another. Often, a proposed solution stalls not because it lacks merit, but because it fails to account for how stakeholders will respond, resist, delay, or reframe the issue based on their own priorities. This is where basic concepts from game theory can be highly illuminating.

Game theory is the study of strategic interaction between players in a system. It assumes that each actor (or “player”) is making decisions based not only on their own interests, but also on how they expect others to act. While the term may sound technical, the core principles are surprisingly intuitive—and useful in analysing political, administrative, and social dynamics.

Let’s take a typical public sector example: your department wants to initiate a data-sharing agreement between health and social services to better support families in crisis. On the surface, everyone agrees this is a good idea. But progress stalls. The health department delays replying to emails. Legal services raise new concerns. No one outright says “no,” but the initiative loses momentum.

From a game theory perspective, you might be witnessing a coordination problem. Each actor fears being the first to move (bearing reputational or legal risk), but hopes others will go ahead. Without a guarantee that the others will reciprocate, everyone stays put. This resembles the classic “stag hunt” scenario—cooperation is optimal, but only if it’s mutual. One way to overcome this is to reduce the perceived risk for first movers: for example, by offering a pilot phase with legal waivers or political cover.

In other cases, you face a zero-sum mindset. Perhaps a department sees your project as competing for scarce resources, credit, or political visibility. Even if the solution is socially beneficial, their strategic position may lead them to block it. Recognising this isn’t cynical—it’s analytical. It helps you shift your approach from persuasion to negotiation.

Game theory also invites you to map not just what actors say, but what they gain or lose from the status quo. Are there hidden incentives to keep things as they are? Are some actors protecting their mandate or budget line? Understanding these dynamics helps you go beyond stakeholder mapping into stakeholder strategy—seeing each actor as a rational agent acting under constraints.

The goal is not to outsmart or manipulate others, but to design for credible collaboration. By anticipating reactions and structuring incentives, you reduce uncertainty and build trust. For example, aligning timelines, creating shared ownership, or pre-committing to shared outcomes can shift the “game” in your favour.

Another valuable perspective comes from the distinction between finite and infinite games, a concept introduced by James P. Carse. A finite game has fixed rules, known players, and a clear end point—like a sports match or an electoral campaign. In contrast, an infinite game has evolving rules, new players, and no clear end point. Its purpose is not to win, but to keep the system going and learning over time.

Many societal challenges—trust in government, climate resilience, education quality—are infinite in nature. Yet many public programs are managed as finite games, focused on KPIs, political cycles, or project lifespans. This mismatch can create friction between departments: those seeking long-term transformation versus those acting under short-term mandates.

The distinction also shows up in individual roles. Political actors such as senators or ministers often operate with finite incentives—limited time in office, pressure to deliver quick results, and media attention. In contrast, public administrators tend to play infinite games: they have career-long horizons, institutional memory, and often aim to sustain long-term service delivery. These different timelines shape how actors respond to change.

Importantly, we can design the system to change the game. For example, if tenant protections are weak, landlords may act in a finite way—minimising investment and

avoiding repairs. But when strong rental laws are in place, requiring landlords to maintain standards and resolve issues, their behaviour shifts. The law transforms the game: cooperation becomes a rational, long-term strategy. This is a powerful reminder that policy and design can alter how people relate—not just to each other, but to the system itself.

As a Social Innovation Officer, your power is not just in identifying problems—but in designing processes that make cooperation possible. Game theory gives you a structured way to anticipate where collaboration might fail—and where it might succeed, if approached strategically.

5. Seeing What's Missing – Requirements Engineering in Public Services

In many public sector projects, the failure point is not a lack of ideas, but a failure to grasp what users actually expect, need, or experience. Often, this disconnect arises because the design of public services is done without a proper analysis of requirements—especially those that are invisible or taken for granted. Requirements engineering, a method borrowed from software development and systems design, offers a structured approach to uncover these gaps.

Requirements engineering is traditionally used to define what a system must be able to do. In the public sector context, it helps us ask: *What does the user expect? What makes a service feel complete? What do they assume will happen, but never explicitly say?* These questions are critical in the problem analysis phase, long before a solution is drafted.

One useful tool is the Kano Model, which categorizes requirements into three layers:

- Threshold requirements are basic expectations—things that must be present for the service to function at all. In public administration, these might include accurate information, respectful treatment, or a working form.
- Performance requirements are things users can clearly articulate. These are measurable and linear: the faster the response time, the better. The more accurate the service, the more satisfied the user.
- Excitement attributes, however, are elements the user may not expect—but which delight or surprise them. These often create the strongest positive emotional responses. Think of a tax portal that automatically fills in past data correctly, or a city office that offers child care during appointments.

Understanding all three types of requirements allows us to map not just what is missing, but what is possible. It also highlights a crucial challenge: not all requirements are equally visible.

Performance attributes are easiest to identify through surveys or direct interviews. But threshold and excitement requirements are often invisible to both users and administrators. People may not mention what they assume will happen (“Of course

the online form should load quickly on the online platform”), nor what they never imagined could be possible (“I didn’t expect a call-back from the caseworker”).

This makes observation and deep engagement critical. For example, spending a day shadowing someone applying for unemployment benefits may reveal threshold problems (forms not mobile-friendly), performance frustrations (long call centre wait times), and hidden excitement potential (a proactive SMS update on case status).

Even more importantly, these requirements differ between populations. Vulnerable groups often have different thresholds (language, documentation), while expectations of performance or excitement may be shaped by previous experiences of exclusion or discrimination.

For Social Innovation Officers, integrating requirements engineering into your problem framing and root cause analysis makes your work more grounded. It protects against two common errors: assuming too little (ignoring basic needs) and promising too much (overestimating what the system can consistently deliver).

In short, before jumping into ideation, take the time to map the user’s journey and identify not just what’s wrong—but what’s missing, expected, or desired. Good innovation begins not with ideas, but with insight.

6. The System That Won’t Let Go – Inertia in Public Administration

Public systems are designed for stability—but that stability can quickly become stagnation. Even when evidence suggests a policy or program no longer delivers results, institutional routines, hierarchies, and accountability structures can make it nearly impossible to stop or pivot.

This phenomenon is not always malicious. Often, solutions persist because they once worked, or because they were politically costly to create. In these cases, the continuation of a solution is not based on its effectiveness, but on the effort, it took to implement it.

For example, a regional youth employment initiative may continue for years despite poor results—because closing it would mean admitting failure, reallocating staff, and disrupting budget lines. This is an example of institutional path dependency: once resources are committed, systems protect the path rather than the purpose.

In such scenarios, public servants are often caught in a bind: they know a program isn’t effective, but they also know that stopping it may trigger backlash, loss of trust, or internal penalties. This creates inertia—often framed as “we’ve always done it this way.”

Understanding this allows social innovators to design interventions that work around or de-risk transitions. It also highlights the need for exit strategies and sunset clauses, especially for experimental programs.

6.1.Dismount the Dead Horse – Cultural Resistance to Letting Go

The phrase “When the horse is dead, dismount” captures a timeless truth: systems often resist acknowledging when a solution has failed. Instead of stopping, organisations invent creative justifications for continuing: they rename the horse, add new riders, change the route, or insist the horse is just tired.

These behaviours are not just metaphorical. They show up in rebranding campaigns, internal process reforms that leave core assumptions untouched, or evaluation reports that overemphasise marginal successes.

Dead horse strategies include:

“We just need more funding.”

“Let’s pilot it again with minor changes.”

“The timing was off; we’ll try next year.”

“It’s politically important, so it must continue.”

As social innovators, identifying dead horses is part of system stewardship. This doesn’t mean ridiculing programs or exposing failure. Rather, it means creating space to reflect honestly and ask: *Is this still working? For whom? At what cost?*

The most important skill here is political sensitivity. Innovation isn’t just about building new things—it’s about helping systems let go of what no longer serves.

6.2.The Sunk Cost Trap – Why Governments Struggle to Stop Investing

Public infrastructure and social programs are often backed by enormous upfront investments—in money, time, and political capital. Once that investment is made, it becomes very difficult to walk away, even when evidence shows that the original assumptions were flawed. This is known as the sunk cost fallacy.

The sunk cost fallacy says: “We’ve spent so much already, we can’t stop now.” But economically and ethically, that is exactly when we should reassess.

Consider a city that has spent €500 million on a highway expansion project. Years later, traffic congestion remains unchanged, and environmental costs are rising. Cancelling the project is politically risky. Continuing it is equally unwise. The system is stuck.

Public servants and political leaders alike fall into this trap, especially when large projects are tied to legacy, prestige, or future elections. Recognising sunk costs as sunk—as unrecoverable—is a first step in reclaiming adaptive governance.

Innovators can help by reframing decisions. Ask: *What would we do if we started today with no history? What are we protecting—money, pride, or purpose?* These questions don’t undo the past, but they can change the next step.

7. Tracing back from political programs

Since as a public servant you operate in a complex system of rules and regulations, political programs and existing government activities, let us take a look at the existing web that you operate in. By doing so, we want to complement the view of external solutions (your “allies”) and internal guidelines. Those internal factors are rarely structured in the clear distinction between problem and solution, often mixing the two or leaving one out entirely. We already mentioned that the “how” is where you can influence the most, while the “what” is mostly a given. We are expanding on this idea now, adding the two layers of problem and solution into the “what is being done”.

7.1.Extracting Problems and Impact Goals from Political Programs

For example, a political program around youth employment was published by your mayor last year. It specifies which funding programs will get renewed, which new funding programs are being implemented and that there will be a new job fair next summer. Those detail “what” is being done already or new, while offering concrete solutions. A political strategy however rarely includes a deeper analysis of the problem, why it exists and persists, which government-external actors are also working on it and who could be considered an ally.

To analyse the true intent behind a political program, policy or law, ask:

- What societal need does this aim to address?
- Who benefits from it?
- Who must act for the program to succeed?
- Are impact goals stated clearly? If not, can we infer them?

For example, a political program around youth employment was published by your mayor last year. It specifies which funding programs will get renewed, which new funding programs are being implemented and that there will be a new job fair next summer. Those detail “what” is being done already or new, while offering concrete solutions. A political strategy however rarely includes a deeper analysis of the problem, why it exists and persists, which government-external actors are also working on it and who could be considered an ally. If you are tasked with implementing this strategy, your levers to act as a social innovator lie in the “how” you implement it and shape the programs, whom you involve and how well you analyse the root causes of the problem at hand. The same goes for most legal texts, which describe a solution to a problem, while never naming the problem.

→ Further Reading: on the “Choice Triad” model, which helps practitioners frame transdisciplinary approaches to complex public health challenges and design effective conditions for choice. Schmidt, Chen and Soldan, Choice Posture,

Architecture, and Infrastructure: Systemic Behavioral Design for Public Health Policy, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2022.08.002>

8. Who Gets to Name the Problem? — Power in Problem Framing

In complex systems, the most influential lever is often not the solution itself, but the way the problem is framed. This framing sets the tone for what types of interventions are possible, who is perceived as responsible, and how success is defined. But here's the critical insight: problem framing is not neutral. It is shaped by power.

In public administration, different actors have vastly different levels of influence over the problem definition. Elected officials, for instance, may define the problem of school dropout as “a lack of discipline,” while education researchers frame it as “structural inequality” and students see it as “irrelevant content and unwelcoming schools.” Each version points to different causes, and more importantly, to different types of solutions.

When only one actor's framing dominates—especially that of the politically powerful—it can marginalise other valid perspectives and result in poor problem–solution fit. This is particularly problematic in social innovation, where the complexity of societal problems requires multi-perspective understanding.

Recognising power dynamics doesn't mean opposing those in authority. Instead, it helps you, as a Social Innovation Officer, to widen the lens. Ask: Who was consulted when this problem was defined? Who wasn't? Who benefits from this framing—and who is silenced by it?

Framing isn't just technical—it's political. A framing that emphasises “lazy citizens” creates space for surveillance and sanctions. A framing that focuses on “underserved populations” enables support and investment. The same dataset, interpreted differently, can lead to either inclusion or exclusion.

Here are some guiding questions:

- Whose voices were missing when the problem was defined?
- What assumptions lie beneath the chosen framing?
- Who gains legitimacy or funding under this definition?
- How does this framing make some solutions appear “impossible” or “inevitable”?

Module 4: Taking Action – Self-Leadership

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Topics Covered

1. Social Innovation Theory
2. Social Transformation Theory
7. Labour, socioeconomic relations and social responsibility

Topics Not Covered

3. Tools and Methodology in SI
4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
5. Principles and practices of design for policy
6. Economic strength and financial variable
8. Urban and rural regeneration
9. Public procurement

Learning objectives of Module 4

Module 4 marks the transition from system understanding to system intervention. It helps Social Innovation Officers reframe their roles within their organisation and identify realistic leverage points for change. This will help to create self-leadership skills in order to stay grounded in the complexities of innovation. Learners will define system boundaries they can influence, apply the 5R Framework to identify systemic constraints, craft meaningful vision and mission statements, and explore collaboration as both a mindset and a method.

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1. From Insight to Action — Reframing Your Role as a Social Innovator

While we see reports about innovation most often in the technological realm, they also most often are portrayed as coming from the private sector. While this is true, and governments can play a role in fostering “external” innovation for example through grants, social innovations can originate from within government too. These innovations are often embedded in broader policy strategies.

Over the past modules, you have developed a detailed understanding of a societal problem: its causes, its complexity, and the reasons it persists despite apparent solutions. You’ve looked at system boundaries, stakeholder dynamics, behavioural patterns, and even the invisible forces like sunk costs or cultural inertia that keep systems from evolving.

Local governments are the first to notice local needs and are therefore not surprisingly the most frequent initiators and stewards of innovation. Regional authorities also play a pivotal role, as they can offer further resources or structural support and (other) political support. National ministries innovate more on a systems-level, meaning that their attention and levers for change address bigger systems, e.g. like collaboration between parts of government.

Now comes the next stage in your journey — preparing to act.

This doesn’t mean jumping straight into designing a solution. In fact, the most effective social innovators in government don’t start with ideas. They start with positioning themselves differently in their role. They ask: “What can I do, from where I sit, to unstick the system?”

1.1. Areas of intervention from your formal role

In traditional public administration, your role might be described narrowly — writing memos, implementing policy, following regulations. But when you adopt the lens of social innovation, your role becomes more expansive. You become someone who sees and works on the system, not just in it. You start to identify where momentum is blocked and where new coalitions, new stories, or new actions could shift something. This shift doesn’t require a promotion or a new title. It requires a mindset.

Social innovation from inside government is not about being heroic or visionary. It’s about becoming system-sensitive and coalition-aware. It’s about identifying where small shifts could create big ripples, and understanding that your influence may not lie in formal authority, but in your ability to convene, connect, reframe, or prototype differently.

This reframing of your role is crucial because it grounds all your future activities — defining your system boundaries, building a 5R map, and engaging with allies — in the real context of what you can actually affect. Your analysis so far may have looked

at the national education system, but your power may lie within a local school board, a municipal program office, or a small interagency task force. Your insights matter — but now, they must be paired with strategic focus.

If you are working in government, your ability to innovate comes not from escaping constraints, but from learning to work creatively within them. In fact, the most meaningful innovations often emerge precisely where the barriers are strongest. These barriers shape the problem — but they also shape the *leverage points*.

Before diving into system analysis tools like the 5R Framework, take a moment to ask yourself:

- What influence do I have — formal or informal?
- What networks do I have access to that others might not?
- What role might I choose to play: convener, translator, integrator, supporter?
- What risks am I willing (or not willing) to take?

Understanding your own position isn't about limiting your ambition — it's about anchoring your strategy in reality, so your action becomes credible, feasible, and sustainable.

0. Choosing the Right System — Drawing Meaningful Boundaries for Action

By now, you've spent a lot of time analysing the problem you care about — its symptoms, root causes, actors, and inertia. But if you now want to *act* on this knowledge, you must answer a deceptively simple question:

2.1. Which system are you actually working in?

In Module 2 and 3, you may have mapped a broad constellation of actors: ministries, NGOs, platforms, frontline staff, beneficiaries. But not all of them are part of the system you can meaningfully influence from your position. In this chapter, you'll define the boundaries of a system that is *realistic* and *actionable* — not too narrow to be irrelevant, and not too large to paralyse you.

2.2. Why Systems Need Boundaries

All problems exist within systems. But systems don't come with a built-in label or size. Is "the education system" your city's public schools? A national ministry? One pilot project in a district? All of these are technically valid, but each requires a different scale of effort, authority, and collaboration.

Without clear boundaries, analysis becomes abstract. Solutions become unmanageable. And your role becomes unclear. That's why drawing system boundaries is a crucial *bridge* between analysis and action.

The system boundary should help you answer:

- Who do I need to influence or work with?
- What rules, resources, or relationships apply here?
- What is my degree of access and influence?

2.3. Working Backward from Your Role

The most effective way to define your system is to work backwards from your current position in government. Ask yourself:

- What geographic level do I work at — municipal, regional, national?
- What types of organisations and actors do I interact with?
- Which programs, budgets, or regulations am I connected to?

Then take your previous stakeholder or stakeholder map and revise it:

- Remove actors far beyond your reach (e.g. national-level ministries if you're in a local office)
- Add actors you might have overlooked but interact with regularly (e.g. municipal IT, public libraries, youth councils)
- Group actors into institutional categories to see structure more clearly

2.4. Systems Are Nested and Overlapping

Remember: systems exist within systems. The school you're focused on is part of the district system, which is part of the national education system. That's fine. You just need to pick the boundary that is actionable, not ultimate. If your initiative creates impact, it might inspire work at other layers later.

The goal is not to oversimplify the system — it's to right-size it, so that your innovation has traction and strategic focus.

0. Analysing Your System with the 5R Framework

Now that you've defined a system boundary that makes sense for your role and influence, you can begin to analyse it in a structured way. That's where the 5R Framework comes in — a tool developed to help make complex systems visible, actionable, and easier to work with for change.

The 5R framework helps you avoid one of the biggest pitfalls in public innovation: jumping to "solutions" without understanding what the system is already *doing*. Often, systems work exactly as they're designed to — just not in ways that align with citizen needs. If you want to shift outcomes, you must understand what's reinforcing them.

Using the 5R framework, you can spot patterns, constraints, and opportunities — and start identifying where small, strategic actions might unlock stuck relationships, rules, or roles.

You may have already created stakeholder maps or actor diagrams in earlier modules. The 5R model helps you go further by identifying not just who is in the system, but how the system functions — what shapes its behaviour, what drives its outcomes, and where the levers for change might be.

The 5R model looks at five interconnected dimensions of a system:

Together, they allow you to make sense of both what is currently happening in the system, and why.

1. Roles

Who are the main actors within your system, and what official or unofficial roles do they play?

Think beyond formal job titles: parents can be informal influencers, NGOs might act as conveners, and IT departments can be silent gatekeepers.

Example: In the school-to-work transition system, schools, job centres, and youth workers all play different roles — but none may be tasked explicitly with follow-up after graduation.

2. Rules

What formal and informal rules govern behaviour in your system?

This includes laws, policies, administrative procedures, but also cultural norms, beliefs, and habits.

Example: In Berlin traffic safety, the traffic code mandates what kind of lights a bicycle must have. This legal prescription creates rigidity that can block alternative innovations for making bikes visible.

3. Resources

What material, human, financial, or digital resources are available (or missing)? Resources can be financial (budgets), human (staffing), informational (data), or reputational (legitimacy).

Example: Schools may want to offer career workshops but lack the budget or staff time to coordinate with employers.

4. Relationships

How do actors in your system interact? Where is trust strong or weak?

This is often where change is either enabled or blocked. Look for collaboration patterns, silos, or power imbalances.

Example: A youth job initiative fails not because of lack of ideas, but because schools and employment agencies don't regularly share information or trust each other's data.

5. Results

What outcomes is the system currently producing? These may not match stated goals.

Some results are intentional (e.g. a training program enrolling 200 people), others are unintended (e.g. high dropout due to scheduling conflicts).

Example: A platform to help citizens apply for jobs may increase digital access — but not actually lead to more employment, because other systemic barriers remain.

0. Collaboration as a Systemic Strategy

By now, you've defined your system, mapped its inner workings, explored your role, and begun to articulate a vision and mission for change. But you may have also come to a humbling realization:

You can't do this alone.

And — more importantly — you're not supposed to.

Social innovation in the public sector is rarely about inventing entirely new solutions from scratch. More often, it's about orchestrating collaboration, aligning fragmented actors, creating shared language, and unlocking capacity that's already there — but siloed.

In that sense, collaboration is not just a “means to an end.” It is a strategic response to system failure — particularly when the system produces poor outcomes not because of bad intentions, but because of misalignment, duplication, or inertia across actors.

4.1. The Public Sector as Convener

One of the unique strengths of government is that it can act as a legitimate convener — bringing together actors from civil society, academia, business, and local communities. Public servants can set the table and invite unlikely guests. That in itself is often a radical act.

As Daniela Papi-Thornton's roles model (educator, gap-filler, convener, systems leader, sharer) reminds us, creating the conditions for others to act together is one of the most powerful forms of leadership in systems change.

4.2. When Collaboration Is the Innovation

Let's return to the example of supporting young people in their transition to work. In many cities, you'll find:

- Well-funded training programs,

- Motivated youth workers,
- Businesses open to hiring,
- And government schemes offering support.

Yet outcomes remain poor. Why? Often because these actors don't collaborate — they're working in parallel, with mismatched assumptions, timelines, or goals.

In such cases, the “solution” isn't just a new app or service. It might be a collaboration infrastructure:

- A regular roundtable between schools, businesses, and job centres;
- A shared data system;
- A co-created engagement strategy for reaching hard-to-access youth.

This is where your role as a Social Innovation Officer becomes clear. You may not be the funder or the policy maker. But you can become the convener, the translator between logics, the connector of dots. This work often begins informally — a phone call here, a workshop there — and gradually evolves into more formal collaboration.

4.3. Collaboration versus Consensus

Important: collaboration doesn't mean everyone agrees. It means they can work together despite different incentives, languages, and logics. It requires:

- Trust-building across time;
- Clear structures (who decides what?);
- Patience for misalignment and conflict;
- And often, a shared story of why the change matters.

You're not looking for perfect harmony — you're looking for aligned action across difference.

4.4. From Engagement to Co-Creation

Support isn't just about getting permission or buy-in. It's about involving others early enough that they feel ownership. Whenever possible, turn one-way communications (presentations, memos) into two-way dialogues (workshops, co-creation sessions). Social innovation isn't something you “sell” to people. It's something you invite them into. This will also reduce resistance later, because people are more likely to support what they helped shape. When colleagues or partners see themselves reflected in the problem framing — or the eventual change — they become invested in its success.

→ Further Reading: For further input on methods and a range of examples see Francis Gouillart and Tina Hallett, Co-Creation in Government
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/co_creation_in_government

0. Crafting Vision and Mission to stay on track during your innovation journey

After the analysis, reflection, mapping, and re-mapping, you've likely experienced how complicated your system is. You may even feel overwhelmed — not because you're unclear, but because you're *more aware* of how many moving parts exist. This is normal. Complex systems don't offer a straight line from problem to solution.

That's why you need something to ground you. Something to help you keep your direction, even when implementation gets bumpy, political priorities shift, or unexpected resistance emerges. That tool is your vision and mission statement. Your journey might involve a few twists and turns, therefore requiring a compass to stay on track. A vision and mission statement can help you to find clarity, when things do not work out the way you planned or when a new opportunity arises, which you did not foresee.

These statements aren't corporate buzzwords. They are tools for personal clarity, team alignment, and communication across boundaries. In the social innovation world, vision and mission are standard tools. There are many examples to learn from. Use Google's advanced search by typing "vision and mission" in quotation marks, combined with terms like "social enterprise" or "non-profit". You'll find dozens of real-world examples to inspire and guide your own writing.

A vision describes the future you want to help create. It is aspirational, long-term, and often just beyond reach. It answers the question: „What would the world look like if we succeeded?"

A good vision doesn't describe your organisation — it describes the change in the world that motivates your efforts. It connects emotionally and ethically to the "why" behind your work.

A mission, on the other hand, defines what you do and for whom. It's more practical and near-term than a vision. It answers: "What's our unique contribution, given our role, resources, and system context?"

In social enterprise practice, your mission often includes a target population, a method, and a value proposition. Here is an example from the Creative Common organisation:

Creative Commons (CC) is an international nonprofit organization that empowers people to grow and sustain the thriving commons of shared knowledge and culture we need to address the world's most pressing challenges and create a brighter future for all.



Our Vision

A world where education, culture, and science are equitably shared as a means to benefit humanity.

Our Mission

CC empowers individuals and communities around the world through technical, legal, and policy solutions that enable the sharing of education, culture, and science in the public interest.

Figure 11 - Example: Vision and Mission of the Creative Commons¹¹

Please note: the terms “Vision” and “Mission” are not always used this way, not even in the Social Innovation and Social Enterprise community. You will find Visions that include the perspective of the organisation (therefore actually being a Mission) and Missions that include smart goals (therefore being too small in scale for a Mission and rather being more of an action plan). For the purpose of this course however, we are sticking with the definition above.

With a strong vision and a clearly articulated mission, you now have:

- A north star that reminds you why your work matters (the vision);
- A statement of intent that helps others understand your role (the mission);
- A touchstone for evaluating new opportunities (“Does this help us get closer to our vision? Is the person/organisation that I am speaking to interested in the same vision?”)

¹¹ Creative Commons, Who we are, <https://creativecommons.org/mission/>

Crafting these statements will not only clarify your purpose — it will make your work easier to communicate, easier to align around, and easier to sustain.

5.1. A Clarification: Mazzucato vs. Traditional Mission Statements

You may have come across economist Mariana Mazzucato's work on mission-oriented innovation. It's important to note that her use of "grand mission" refers to broad, public innovation goals like decarbonisation, digital transformation, or eliminating child poverty. These address societal problems, not organisational ones. They are more akin to what we call a "Vision". Mazzucato differentiates between a "Grand Mission" and a "Mission", while we use "Vision" and "Mission" instead.

Therefore, in this course, "mission" refers to your strategic role as a Social Innovation Officer — your specific contribution that aligns your work with a public need (like improving youth employment) and the vision statement to tackle that need, your own mission clarifies your unique role within that larger vision. We do so because you will find more examples this way, since "grand mission" is not typically used as a term.

0. Navigating Trust and Risk as an Innovator

As participants in this course moving from problem analysis to action, the challenge of leading oneself becomes increasingly significant. In public administration—where resources are limited, legitimacy is contested, and impact unfolds slowly—self-leadership is not a personal luxury, but a professional necessity. To sustain innovation, one must first learn to govern their own responses to complexity, risk, and uncertainty. This includes reflecting on your patterns of trust and mistrust, your approach to risk, and how these influence your ability to lead others.

Trust is central to this equation. Leading social innovation requires the ability to trust others without full control over outcomes, and to invite others to trust you, often without guaranteed success. The temptation to over-control—to double-check every detail, to hold onto information, or to defer responsibility—can be strong. Yet excessive control not only slows innovation but can also foster environments of fear, dependency, and inefficiency. When team members feel constantly scrutinised, the result is rarely higher quality. Instead, personal initiative declines and errors increase, not because of incompetence, but because responsibility is subtly removed.

Building trust, then, is not simply about offering unconditional confidence in others. It is about recognising that trust is a form of professional judgement. It includes providing clarity about expectations, creating space for others to make decisions, and responding to mistakes with learning rather than blame. This form of distributed ownership does not eliminate risk—it reconfigures it. Instead of managing risk alone, the leader becomes responsible for cultivating the collective ability to absorb and learn from it.

The same applies to information. In hierarchical institutions, knowledge often becomes currency—guarded and selectively released. Yet in systems that seek

transformation, withholding information undermines effectiveness. When employees or peers act in ways we perceive as irrational or inefficient, it is often a reflection of information gaps rather than poor intent. Self-leadership, in this context, means intentionally designing for transparency: thinking about how routines, conversations, and workflows can be made more permeable so that information naturally flows to those who need it.

This is not always easy. Sharing sensitive knowledge can feel risky—especially in organisational cultures that reward caution over openness. But the question remains: What is the cost of not sharing? Often, the risks we fear are either unsubstantiated or manageable when made visible. Treating information-sharing as a strategic act of trust, rather than a threat to authority, is one of the most powerful shifts a leader can make.

Self-leadership is closely tied to how we interpret our role within an organisation and how we relate to uncertainty, control, and collaboration. It can be useful to pause and consider your own tendencies: Do you prefer to minimise risk by holding on to responsibility, or do you actively involve others in decision-making? Are there patterns in how you manage information—perhaps sharing selectively or delaying communication until outcomes are more certain? Noticing these habits is not about assigning blame but about identifying opportunities for small, intentional adjustments. In environments where innovation depends on mutual trust and shared responsibility, even subtle changes in how you lead yourself—what you share, how you respond to others, when you let go—can shift the conditions under which good ideas grow. The aim is not perfection, but awareness: understanding how your preferences shape your leadership, and whether those preferences still serve the goals you now pursue.

→ Further Reading: There are a lot of resources on Self-Leadership and how to create a trusted environment in teams. This study from New Zealand summarises findings on Relational Leadership as a form of new leadership in public institutions, using the Wallace 2D architecture approach. Hastings, B et al (2025). Relational Leadership: an approach to public sector capability development ANZSOG, Research Insights, No.41. Australia & New Zealand School of Government
<https://anzsog.edu.au/app/uploads/2025/04/RelationalLeadershipFINALv3.pdf>

Module 5: Solution Basics – Exploring

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Topics Covered

1. Social Innovation Theory
2. Social Transformation Theory
3. Tools and Methodology in SI
5. Principles and practices of design for policy
9. Orienting public procurement to support social innovation

Topics Not Covered

4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
6. Economic strength and financial variable
7. Labour and social responsibility
8. Urban and rural regeneration

Learning objectives of Module 5

Module 5 guides learners towards shaping effective, system-sensitive innovations, after the previous modules gave the backbone by analysing complex societal problems and understanding systemic inertia. The emphasis shifts from diagnosing issues to designing solutions that respond to the root causes identified in previous modules. Rather than bypassing systemic barriers, learners are taught to work within and around them, leveraging tools like the Fast Idea Generator and the Six Conditions for Systems Change. Legal and budgetary frameworks, procurement mechanisms, and hybrid funding models are explored as both limitations and levers for sustainable innovation. Learners also practice aligning their innovations with global goal frameworks like the SDGs and Doughnut Economics to boost impact and legitimacy.

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1. Innovating in your chosen system

After investing time and effort into deep problem analysis in the previous modules, you now stand on firmer ground to begin shaping your social innovation. But before jumping into action, it is essential to translate your systemic understanding into strategic choices. Social innovation that truly works addresses the structural weaknesses of a system—it doesn't bypass them. For that we will use all of the previous module workbook exercises and build upon them.

Let's briefly recap the analysis tools you've already used:

- You framed and re-framed the problem using stakeholder lenses and system tensions.
- You distinguished between internal and societal problems, explored root causes, and used the Problem Tree and Kano Model to understand user experience and unmet needs.
- You identified system elements through the 5R Framework: roles, relationships, rules, resources, and results.
- You used tools like the Daniela Papi role framework to identify which actor is a convener, gap-filler, educator, or systems leader and what role your organisation occupies currently.
- You analysed system symptoms—like inertia, blame, and fragmentation—using a five-part reform lens: goal, capacity, action plan, resources, and incentives.

Now it's time to close the loop and use this knowledge to shape the first outlines of your solution. But not just any solution—a system-sensitive one.

1.1. From Analysis to Action: A Case

Let's return to our earlier example of youth unemployment. Your 5R map showed that local schools lack resources, but also that employment offices don't have incentives to collaborate. Your system symptoms indicated repeated project failures. Your next step might be to develop an inter-institutional coordination mechanism—not just another program, but a method of solving the misalignment.

You might act as a convener, bringing stakeholders into a collaborative design process, and back your innovation with budget data (legal/financial literacy) and behavioural insights (from the Kano Model).

1.2. Frame the Innovation to Match the System's Gaps

This is the essence of Social Innovation: not inventing something new for its own sake, but creating change that is aligned with systemic needs. The solution doesn't

have to be big or flashy—it needs to address what the system currently lacks and can absorb.

By designing from the system's fractures—not just its frontlines—you make your intervention more resilient, strategic, and effective.

0. Using Creative Tools for Public Innovation: Fast Idea Generator

When we think of innovation, we often imagine a single brilliant idea—something new, unique, and disruptive. But in the context of public administration, innovation tends to emerge from iterative, structured processes. You've done the heavy lifting of analysing the system and identifying where things go wrong. Now, it's time to generate a broad field of ideas—and then refine one or two promising directions for further development.

In this stage, idea generation is not about immediate feasibility. It's about shaking loose your mental limitations—the things you think are not possible simply because “that's not how it's done in government.” Many innovative solutions begin with unlikely or provocative ideas that are later reshaped into something workable.

One of the simplest tools to use here is the Fast Idea Generator. It helps you quickly generate multiple ideas by applying creative constraints. For example, you might:

- Reverse the current logic: What if the beneficiary delivered the service, rather than received it?
- Exaggerate or shrink the scale: What if this solution applied city-wide? Or only in one neighbourhood?
- Substitute actors: What if this service was run by a school, not the employment office?
- Remove components: What if we eliminated one step in the current process entirely?

When used with colleagues, this tool becomes even more effective. Group idea generation helps unlock the assumptions everyone has been carrying—and makes the invisible, visible. The goal isn't to agree right away, but to get all possible ideas on the table. Even “wild” ideas can help you reframe your challenge.

0. Deep Levers for Systems Change: Mapping All Six Conditions

In previous modules, we explored how legal frameworks and public budgets create boundaries that shape — and sometimes limit — your ability to create change. These constraints are part of the visible structure of a system. But social innovation in public administration rarely succeeds through surface-level adjustments alone. For long-term change, you must work deeper — to shift the underlying systems that sustain the status quo.

To support this kind of thinking, we introduce a framework that distinguishes six conditions for systems change, often visualized as a pyramid. This model, developed by FSG and other change theorists, is useful for understanding where to act, where to expect slow movement, and how to build strategies that reach deeper into the system.

3.1. The Six Conditions for Systems Change

The top three (policies, practices, resources) are more tangible and often easier to influence directly. The bottom three (relationships, power, and mental models) are less visible but profoundly shape whether the system adapts or resists.

If your solution contradicts dominant mental models, it will likely be resisted — or misunderstood. For instance, if you're building a youth employment platform that allows informal skill certifications, but the system only values university degrees, then the mental model of “what counts as valid education” must be addressed.

On the other hand, shifting mental models can enable dramatic systems change. When citizens start seeing homeless individuals as people facing structural hardship (rather than “lazy”), public demand for supportive housing may increase. This in turn influences media, politics, and budgets.

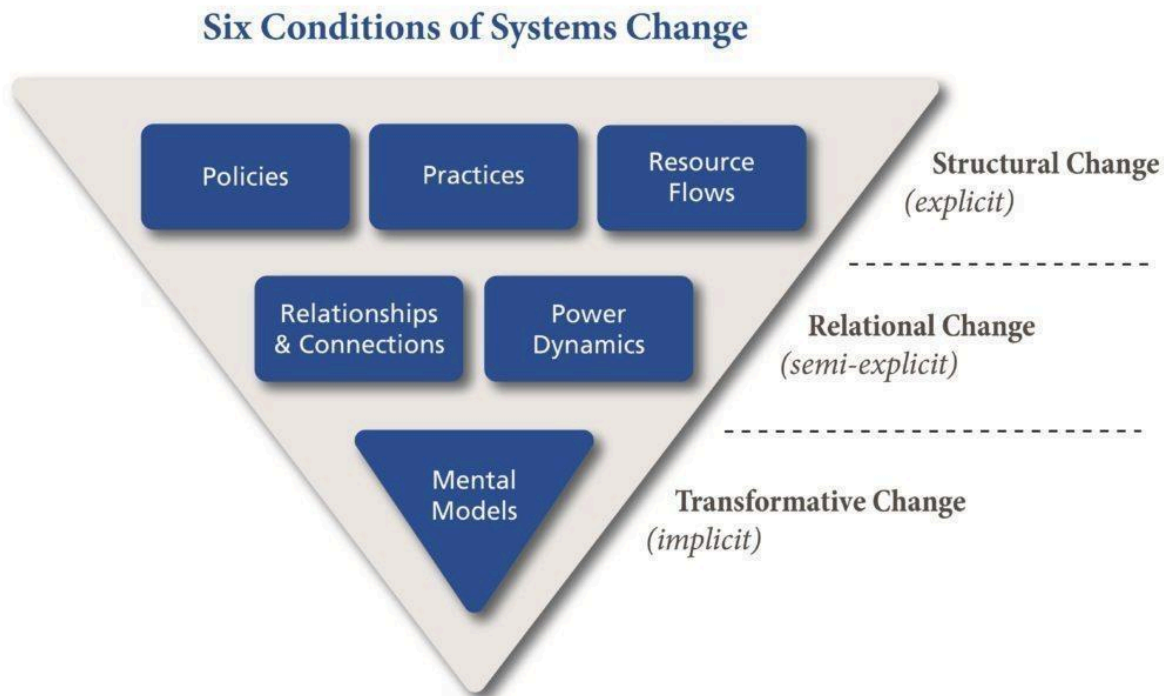


Figure 12 - Six Conditions for Systems Change¹²

¹² John Kania, Mark Kramer, Peter Senge, The Water of Systems Change, 2018, https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/

- Policies – Formal rules and legislation (e.g. school attendance laws, procurement guidelines).
- Practices – Habits or routines of institutions (e.g. how public officials allocate time or prioritize cases).
- Resource Flows – Distribution of money, people, information (e.g. staffing budgets, data transparency).
- Relationships & Connections – Networks between actors (e.g. collaboration between ministries, trust between NGOs and government).
- Power Dynamics – Who holds formal and informal power, and how decision-making is distributed (e.g. who gets to set the agenda, whose voices count).
- Mental Models – Deep beliefs, norms, and assumptions about how the world works (e.g. “poor people are lazy” or “government is inefficient by default”).

In Module 5, we already covered how to navigate policy and budgeting constraints. These are necessary, but not sufficient. Systems often resist change even when new policies are adopted, because relationships and beliefs remain unchanged. This is where public innovators must become systemic thinkers: identifying which levers are already being pulled and which remain untouched.

For example, a new youth employment program might be well-funded and aligned with education policy. But if employers continue to believe that unemployed youth are unreliable (a mental model), or if there’s no collaboration between schools and job centres (a relationship failure), the program will struggle to deliver real outcomes.

3.2. Power and Mental Models

Power and mental models are deeply interconnected. People with institutional authority (politicians, department heads) can often reinforce or challenge dominant narratives. But power is not just positional — it can also be cultural or informational. An NGO with deep community ties may lack legal authority but hold immense narrative power.

Changing mental models does not require converting everyone’s belief system overnight. It begins with surfacing the existing assumptions. For example, if a city department still views citizen involvement as a risk or nuisance, even the most “participatory” planning process may be hollow.

As a social innovation officer, you are unlikely to control mental models. But you can influence them by telling a better story, presenting data that challenges false assumptions, and creating experiences that demonstrate an alternative logic.

Example: In some countries, homelessness is treated as a lifestyle choice, shaping harsh regulations. But data from Finland’s “Housing First” model challenged this

assumption — showing that stable housing reduces both cost and suffering. That evidence shifted power and perception.

3.3. Understanding and Managing Mental Models

Mental models are the often-invisible beliefs, assumptions, and narratives that shape how people interpret reality and decide what is possible. In systems thinking, they represent the deepest level of system structure — the "why" behind behaviour, practices, and policies. Because of this, they are also one of the most powerful, yet difficult, levers for systemic change.

You have likely encountered mental models in your daily work without naming them as such. When a colleague insists “This is just how public administration works,” or when a policy is based on the assumption that “people in need are not motivated to change,” these are examples of mental models at play.

- Tell New Stories → [See the workbook for an exercise on storytelling](#)
Real-life examples, testimonials, or data narratives can powerfully reframe public beliefs.
- Create New Experiences
Engaging people in prototypes or pilot projects can allow them to see things differently.
- Change Language and Symbols
Even renaming a policy (e.g., “Basic Income” vs. “Welfare”) can shift public perception.
- Use Data Thoughtfully □ use your impact logic model with impact measurement. See module 6
Complement statistics with context — show both the system and the human story.
- Act as a Role Model
Government staff who “walk the talk” build new narratives by doing.

As a Social Innovation Officer, one of your strongest tools is framing: how you speak, write, and visualize change. Practice identifying mental models in policy texts, meetings, and citizen feedback. Ask: *What would have to be true for people to believe this is the best solution?*

This reflective stance allows you to design smarter interventions — ones that address not only what people do, but why they do it.

3.4. Use in Your Practice

Take a look at your system again. Ask:

- Which of the six conditions have already been targeted?

- Where is change already happening?
- Where are deeper changes needed?
- Who controls (or protects) the current condition?

When you build your solution idea, consider which levels it addresses. Solutions that touch only one layer may lead to short-term change. Those that address multiple — particularly power and belief systems — have the potential for long-term systems transformation.

0. Legal and Budgetary Constraints — Boundaries and Levers for Social Innovation

One of the most persistent challenges for social innovation in public administration is working within constraints that appear non-negotiable—legal regulations and budget structures. At first glance, these may seem like barriers. However, a deeper understanding reveals that many of these constraints can also offer entry points or levers for change if approached strategically.

Let's begin with legal frameworks. In many policy fields, such as healthcare, education, or social protection, the law prescribes in great detail what public services must do and who is entitled to receive them. This level of legal rigidity can limit experimentation. However, social innovation does not always require rewriting laws. Often, the space for innovation lies in how laws are interpreted and implemented. For instance, the wording of a statute might allow for different forms of service delivery, or the law might be silent on procedural details, leaving room for co-creation or digital transformation.

One practical approach is to identify where in the legal framework your idea touches existing laws or regulations. Ask yourself:

- Is the existing legal text prescriptive (defining methods) or principle-based (defining goals)?
- Could the law allow alternative forms of delivery without changing the law itself?
- What discretionary powers exist for frontline staff or decision-makers?

Next, consider public budgets. They are both a limitation and a signal of priority. Budgets in many governments are structured according to past allocations, and often lack flexibility. Social innovation projects might struggle to find immediate funding because they do not yet fit any line item. But there are strategies to work around this: identifying underspent funds, applying for discretionary budgets, or even partnering with civil society or philanthropic sources. Mixed financing models—where a project receives public, philanthropic, and private support—are becoming more common in innovative projects, especially in fields like health, youth,

or digital inclusion. → Further Reading: Roots of Impact, SIINC,
<https://roots-of-impact.org/impact-linked-finance/why/>

A further lever is to embed impact thinking into budget processes. While impact budgeting is not yet widespread, you can begin at the micro level. For example, if you are procuring services, include quality and social impact criteria in your tenders. If your agency can issue grants, consider outcomes-based funding. Both approaches help shift the system from inputs and compliance toward outcomes and purpose. → Further Reading: European Commission, Tools for Public Buyers,
https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/tools-public-buyers/social-procurement_en

To explore legal and financial opportunities in your system, try the following self-assessment:

- Where in the legal process does your project intersect with rules or standards?
- Which department owns that legal text or budget? Are they open to experimentation?
- Are there existing precedents (in your country or elsewhere) of legal flexibility in similar cases?
- What financial levers (procurement, pilot funds, discretionary spending) are realistically within your reach?

4.1. Public Procurement as a Tool for Social Innovation

Public procurement is one of the most powerful levers available to government actors. Each year, governments spend large portions of their budgets to procure goods, services, and infrastructure. This makes procurement not just an administrative function but a potential driver of systemic change—if used strategically.

As a Social Innovation Officer, you may not control the procurement process directly, but you should understand how it works and where social value can be embedded. Procurement can support social innovation in two key ways: by prioritizing outcomes, and by selecting providers who contribute to public value beyond delivery.

Let's take an example: a municipality needs to contract a new catering provider for its public schools. A traditional procurement process might award the contract solely on price. But an impact-oriented procurement could include additional criteria: nutritional value of the meals, use of local ingredients, sustainability in packaging, and even job creation for marginalized groups. Suddenly, the same money creates better food and stronger social outcomes.

Governments across Europe are already experimenting with socially responsible procurement. The EU's 2014 procurement directives specifically allow public

authorities to include social, environmental, and innovative criteria in their tender processes. This opens doors for social enterprises, mission-driven SMEs, and cross-sector collaborations.

Some key shifts in procurement to support innovation include:

- Moving from lowest cost to best value, including long-term social benefits.
- Allowing flexibility in contract design, for example through innovation partnerships.
- Encouraging outcome-based specifications, which describe the result rather than the method.
- Creating space for pilot programs or phased contracts that allow for iteration.

If your solution involves external implementation—such as working with NGOs, tech companies, or universities—you will eventually need to think about how to structure a procurement or partnership that supports the values of your innovation. Even internal programs may depend on procurement for digital tools, space design, or training services.

It is crucial to collaborate with the procurement department early. Many officials in this area are open to social value, but require clear specifications and compliance. You can support them by linking your needs to existing procurement regulations or public value goals such as the SDGs.

Finally, public procurement also sends a powerful signal. By choosing to work with values-aligned actors and rewarding social benefit, the government shapes markets and models for others to follow.

→ Further Reading: European Commission, Buying Social
<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/45767>

→ Tools for public procurement in City Planning <https://urbact.eu/toolbox-home>

→ Further Reading: UrbAct, Planning Towards a Strategic and Responsible Public Procurement in Pamplona, 2024,
<https://urbact.eu/planning-towards-strategic-and-responsible-public-procurement-pamplona>

4.2. Hybrid and Mixed Funding Models for Scaling Social Innovation

Public innovation often starts with a good idea—but without proper funding, even the best idea can wither. Traditional funding models in public administration tend to rely on single-source, annual, and often highly regulated budgets. Yet, the nature of social innovation—cross-sectoral, experimental, iterative—often requires a more flexible and diversified approach. That's where hybrid or mixed funding models come in.

A hybrid funding model blends public sector resources with support from other sectors—such as philanthropy, corporate partnerships, or community-based investment. These models are becoming increasingly common in social infrastructure, digital public services, and local service innovation, where rigid funding schemes have failed to deliver lasting results.

Examples of Hybrid Models in Practice:

- The Local Food Bank of Sector 6 (Romania)
Combines municipal funding with private logistics support from companies like Glovo. This collaboration helps scale distribution while keeping operational costs manageable.
- Spazio Nòva (Italy)
Transforms abandoned public spaces into community hubs through public-private partnerships. The public sector provides space and governance oversight; private actors contribute services and financial backing.
- A Shop is Not Just a Shop (Italy)
Public funding is used to support local retail—but businesses must return value through social activities, such as hosting community workshops or providing goods to low-income households.

These examples illustrate not only innovative financing, but a broader shift toward collaborative public value creation, where public, private, and civic actors co-invest in shared outcomes.

Social innovation often begins with pilots—but pilots without a viable funding model are destined to remain experiments. Mixed funding allows:

- Reduced risk for any one funder, especially in the early stages.
- Greater flexibility in adapting a service to real-world needs.
- Stronger community ownership, especially when civic actors co-finance or contribute in-kind support.

Yet there are challenges too. Different actors may have incompatible timelines, decision processes, or accountability systems. You may also face legal limits on how public funds can be blended or redirected. Therefore, it's important to explore what is legally permissible in your jurisdiction, and whether you need a formal agreement (e.g. memorandum of understanding, service contract, pilot clause) to proceed.

Questions to Consider Before Choosing a Mixed Model:

- What types of actors are willing to co-invest in your solution—and why?
- Does the innovation require long-term funding, or could it become financially self-sustaining? → Dive deeper into Social Entrepreneurship at Module 1.

- What risks does each partner carry? Are they proportionate to their contribution?
- Who will “own” the innovation over time?
- How transparent and accountable is the funding model to the public?

Hybrid models are not the answer to every funding gap. But they offer more adaptability and resilience than traditional models—especially in times of uncertainty or austerity.

4.3. Examples of financially sustainable social innovations

These models demonstrate potential for long-term resilience, though they often require strong initial support and capacity-building to reach sustainability. A Self-sustaining Model means operating with a long-term goal of financial self-sufficiency. These models often begin with public or philanthropic seed funding but evolve into revenue-generating entities:

- Myrmidones Social Cooperative (Greece): Generates income through service provision while supporting people with mental health conditions.
- FIX Cluj (Romania): Although initially grant-funded, it encourages youth-led start-ups to become financially independent.
- Alba Iulia City Branding (Romania): Attracted private investment and tourism revenue through a professional branding strategy, reducing reliance on public funds.

0. Using External Goal Frameworks for System Alignment

When building solutions within public administration, social innovation officers often work in systems where internal goals—such as annual targets, performance indicators, or compliance objectives—dominate day-to-day decisions. Yet societal problems typically extend beyond institutional boundaries, legal mandates, or the election cycle. Aligning your solution with external goal frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the Doughnut Economy Model, helps you situate your innovation within a broader systemic context.

These frameworks offer more than inspiration—they provide concrete indicators, benchmarks, and narratives that can enhance legitimacy and accountability. Governments in many countries already use such frameworks for reporting or strategic planning. Even if your agency does not require it formally, using them voluntarily can help communicate your intention clearly and align your solution with societal needs.

Let's take the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These 17 goals, supported by 169 specific targets and over 230 indicators, touch on nearly every area of public life—from health and education to sustainable cities, economic inequality, and

climate action. For example, if you are working on improving access to digital public services for low-income citizens, you might find direct alignment with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The indicators under each goal can guide your measurement plan and storytelling. Instead of merely saying, “we made our portal easier to use,” you might frame your success as “contributing to equal access to public services across all income levels.” Using the SDGs as a framework will also help you to find other actors, who are working on the same goal, since you are using a shared language. → further reading
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Another valuable model is Kate Raworth’s Doughnut Economy, which frames sustainable development as existing within two boundaries: a social foundation and an ecological ceiling. Falling below the social foundation results in unmet human needs (such as access to housing, education, or healthcare), while overshooting the ecological ceiling leads to environmental degradation (such as biodiversity loss or water pollution). This model encourages public innovators to think about the broader ripple effects of their solutions—not just who benefits, but at what cost to the environment or social cohesion. → Further Reading: Doughnut Economics Action Lab – <https://doughnuteconomics.org>

Using these frameworks does not mean abandoning local relevance. On the contrary, localizing global goals is a powerful method for ensuring your solution contributes to meaningful change. For instance, the city of Amsterdam adapted the Doughnut Model into its urban planning strategy, redefining growth to align with social justice and ecological sustainability. Your work can take a similar approach: translate global indicators into the language of your city, agency, or region.

When choosing a framework to work with, consider these questions:

- Which external goals are already part of my institution’s strategy or reporting obligations?
- Which global or national indicators help explain the problem I am trying to solve?
- Are there external frameworks that support the values my solution promotes (e.g. equity, resilience, trust)?

This kind of alignment is not just useful for planning. It can help you engage external partners (such as NGOs, universities, or funders) and explain the relevance of your project to broader audiences, including political decision-makers.

Module 6: Solution Advanced – Synthesis

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Topics Covered

3. Tools and Methodology in SI
4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
5. Principles and practices of design for policy
6. Economic strength and financial variable

Topics Not Covered

1. Social Innovation Theory
2. Social Transformation Theory
7. Labour and social responsibility
8. Urban and rural regeneration
9. Public procurement

Learning objectives of Module 6

Module 6 supports participants in translating innovative ideas into structured, scalable, and evidence-based solutions. It builds on previous modules by deepening skills in clarifying goals, aligning ideas with system gaps, and constructing detailed impact logic model. Learners are introduced to concepts like efficiency, effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and evidence-based policymaking. The module also tackles practical challenges like managing resistance, balancing risk, and understanding the legal and budgetary environment for innovation in public administration. Emphasis is placed on letting go of unfit solutions, building institutional trust, and designing with clarity and accountability.

Text content for moodle platform

1. From Idea Spread to Solution Focus

Once you've generated many ideas, it's time to bring back structure. In this module we will explore the following questions:

- Which of these ideas links back clearly to the system gap you've identified?
- Which one aligns with your vision and impact goal?
- Which one has some level of feasibility, given your legal or budgetary constraints?
- Which ideas are low-cost and fast to pilot, even if they're not perfect?

A note of caution: Many projects fail—not because the idea is wrong, but because of new external factors or because the scaling phase was not considered appropriately during the pilot phase. Piloting something with no hope of systemic uptake (too expensive, too complex, or reliant on one champion) only gets you to the invention part and cannot be considered a full innovation.

2. Kill Your Darlings – Letting Go for Better Fit

One of the most difficult tasks in the innovation process is letting go of your own ideas. The term “kill your darlings” comes originally from writing and storytelling, where creators are advised to cut even their most beloved passages if they don't serve the story. In social innovation, the same principle applies: you may feel passionate about a certain solution, but if it does not match the problem, if the system is not ready, or if it cannot scale sustainably, it must be left behind.

This can feel counterintuitive. You may have invested time and energy into developing your concept. You may have already pitched it to colleagues or even secured a small pilot. But good innovators stay flexible. They use new data or insights to refine their course—even if that means stopping or replacing their current approach.

Killing your darling is not the same as giving up. It is about respecting the complexity of the system you are trying to influence. It is about letting the problem—not your initial idea—lead the way.

There are several signs that you might need to kill your darling:

- New data suggests the root cause of the problem lies elsewhere.
- A better solution already exists in the ecosystem.
- Your proposal is impossible to scale with available resources.
- The stakeholders involved (especially those with power) are not willing to engage.

- The risk is disproportionate to the expected impact.

In these cases, it is often more responsible and effective to let go than to push forward.

This doesn't mean the entire innovation journey stops. On the contrary, it means going back to your tools—like the Fast Idea Generator—and developing new ideas that are better suited to the system and the people within it. Many innovators use this moment as a way to build legitimacy with their peers, showing that they are driven by outcomes, not ego.

You can also use this moment to include others. Invite a colleague or partner to join you in revisiting the problem. Explore what might still be possible within the current context. In doing so, you move from being an advocate of one idea to being a steward of change—someone who shapes the right solution for the right time.

Letting go of a beloved idea can feel like a loss. But in practice, it is often the beginning of real impact. By killing your darling, you make room for something more grounded, more relevant, and more likely to succeed.

3. Clarifying Goals in Complex Systems

When designing a social innovation in public administration, you will encounter many uses of the word “goal”. At first glance, this seems straightforward — but the diversity of meanings across political programs, departmental strategies, and individual project mandates can create confusion and conflict. As was mentioned before, goals can exist in all shapes and forms. When innovating with the goal to increase value for the public good, you want to have an impact goal in place – but there might be many more goals to consider and they might rival your impact goal.

3.1. Why Goals Get Messy in Government

In your day-to-day work, you may encounter many different types of goals. For example:

- Political goals (e.g., “Make our city greener!”) that are aspirational but vague.
- Operational goals that relate to service delivery (e.g., “Process all building permits within 6 weeks”).
- Personal goals of individual actors (e.g., “Increase our department’s visibility”).
- Legal goals embedded in laws or regulations (e.g., “Ensure equal access to social services”).
- Impact and Outcome goals that describe changes for the society or beneficiary (e.g., “Youth feel confident entering the job market”).

All of these may be called “goals,” but they serve different purposes and often point in different directions. That’s why it is important to sort through them before

building your solution. Lack of clarity leads to conflicting interpretations, poor prioritisation, and project misalignment. In social innovation, you want to clearly express:

- Your impact goal (the change in society you want to see)
- The outcome (what should change in the beneficiary's life)
- The outcome in other target groups (how other actors — like government staff — will behave differently)
- The activity you will implement (the concrete intervention. Sometimes these are framed as SMART goals)

This sequence is already familiar from your impact logic model and from the introduction. But before you can confidently fill in the right-hand side of that logic model, you need to trace what existing goals already live in your system and where they can potentially be integrated into your impact logic model.

3.2. An Example in Conflicting Goals: Digitalisation in Education

Imagine you are innovating around education access. You may find the following goals, maybe from different sources from your political leaders to media mentions:

- A political goal to “digitise all schools”
- An operational goal to “equip every classroom with tablets”
- A legal goal about equal access to education
- Your beneficiary-oriented goal: “Children with learning disabilities can access tailored support”

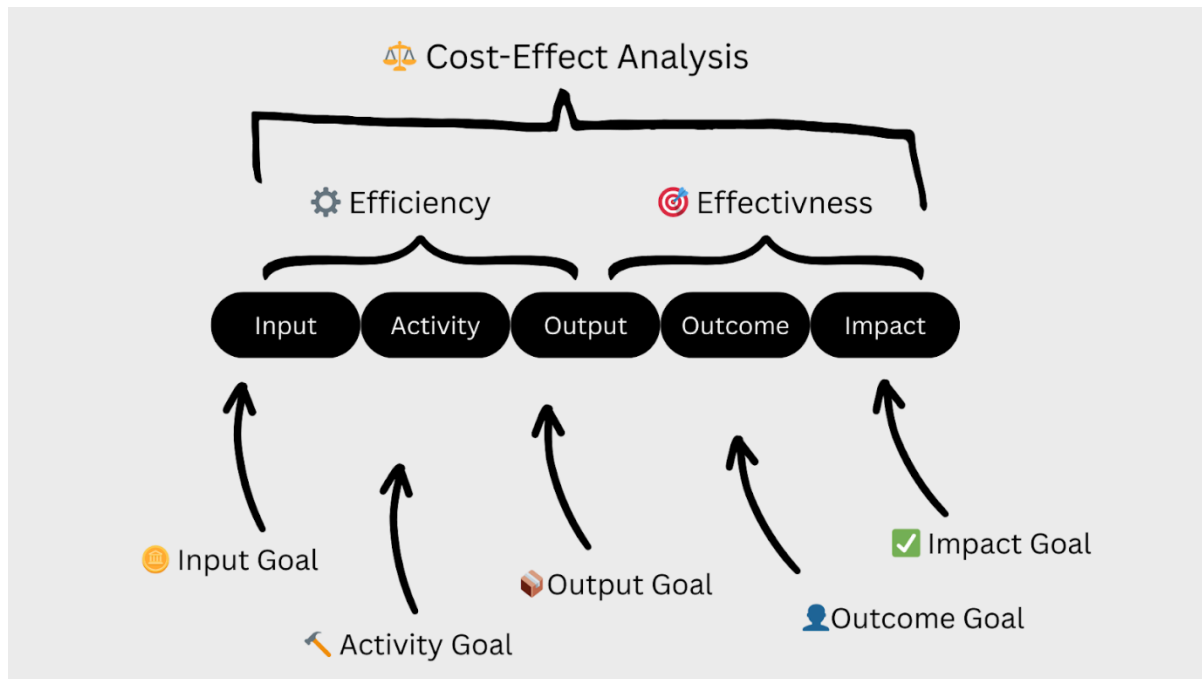


Figure 13 – Seven types of goals (own illustration)

These goals may overlap or clash. Unless you state your own impact goal and organise all other goals clearly, you may be absorbed into other agendas without ever challenging whether they serve the deeper purpose.

Use goal sorting early in your innovation process. Ask: What goals already exist? What type of goal is this? Which other goal is missing to build a strong impact case (mostly outcome goals are missing the most often) This allows you to filter out noise, identify tensions, and build a consistent narrative. Once you've identified your goal, you can align (or intentionally misalign) with others.

3.3. Impact goals when innovating internally

As we have seen, the column “impact” in the impact logic model requires a beneficiary group outside government. This might be difficult if you want to focus on changes within government instead. Here, you might not have an explicit “external” beneficiary like citizens or companies.

When your innovation faces purely internally, choosing an impact goal that still addresses the public or a specific citizen group will feel very difficult at the start. After all, for example if building an internal software, you are not really in touch with the citizens and the effect of your innovation on citizens might only be loosely connected. You nevertheless need this impact goal in order to have a clear orientation.

To make this easier, you might want to take more generic impact goals, that still connect to citizens, but in a more abstract way. “Trust in government” is a great

example here, but not the only impact goal, you can choose. You can find more, when looking at what “characteristics” a public administration should have: trustworthy, collaborative, understandable, easy to approach, fair, fast... you can continue this list until you find the characteristic, which you find particularly worthwhile following or which is particularly needed in your context.

4. Connecting long term goals with operations using the OKR method

OKR stands for "Objectives and Key Results" and is a goal-setting and implementation method originally developed in the private sector but increasingly adopted by public institutions seeking to improve strategic focus, accountability, and cross-departmental coordination.

The method helps teams align their efforts by translating abstract visions into actionable goals with measurable results. In public administration, this can serve as a bridge between long-term social impact aspirations and the day-to-day realities of departmental work, which are often fragmented across units, hierarchies, and administrative logics.

An OKR consists of one Objective that describes a clearly defined and ambitious target state—something inspiring and slightly out of reach. This is then broken down into Key Results, which are concrete, observable, and measurable milestones that indicate progress toward the objective. These Key Results are typically short-term, often planned for no longer than four months ahead, and allow for regular tracking and adjustment.

The method differs from traditional public administration planning tools in several ways. First, it embraces a culture of iteration and learning. Rather than being tied to fixed annual plans or rigid key performance indicators (KPIs), OKRs invite teams to reassess their assumptions and revise their course based on evidence and feedback. Second, OKRs emphasize outcome-oriented thinking over activity tracking. This means asking what should change as a result of actions taken—not just whether those actions were executed. Third, OKRs can enhance interdepartmental collaboration by making shared goals and dependencies explicit, especially when multiple teams contribute to the same objective.

When used in the public sector, OKRs require some adaptation. For example, success may not be measured in revenue or market share, but in social value, citizen satisfaction, or institutional learning. This makes it an ideal method for Social Innovation, as we already are targeting social value creation. Furthermore, timelines and legal constraints in government must be factored into goal-setting. To ensure democratic legitimacy, the design of OKRs in government may also benefit from participatory elements or feedback loops with citizens and frontline staff.

A practical example of OKR use in the public sector comes from the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP) in Ukraine, which implements the OKR methodology to improve performance management, transparency, and coordination

within the agency. The agency uses OKRs to set clear objectives and measurable key results, aligning individual and team goals with its anti-corruption mission, and making OKRs a regular part of its planning and reporting cycle.

□ Further Reading: OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI): Implementation of OKRs methodology in National Agency on Corruption Prevention, <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/implementation-of-okrs-methodology-in-national-agency-on-corruption-prevention/>

5. Overcoming Systemic Resistance ('Dead Horses' Revisited)

You may recall the earlier discussion of the “dead horse” metaphor—continuing to ride a strategy or structure long after it has proven ineffective. In many government systems, such dead horses are not just held onto—they are protected, funded, and even celebrated. This resistance to letting go of outdated solutions is one of the greatest obstacles to public sector innovation.

Returning to this metaphor now, at the advanced stage of developing your social innovation, allows you to act strategically. In Module 3, you learned to identify dead horses by observing repeated failures, mounting sunk costs, or public dissatisfaction without meaningful reform. Here in Module 6, the focus shifts from identifying to *overcoming* them—knowing full well that many resistances are deeply embedded in systems and cultures.

Systemic resistance often arises from fear, identity, and power. Changing or retiring a long-standing program can threaten the identity of the department that built it, or the job roles of those who implement it. It can reveal uncomfortable truths about wasted public money or policy failures. Even when stakeholders agree a program is not working, they may resist change because the alternatives are politically sensitive, untested, or administratively complex.

Overcoming this resistance requires more than rational arguments or efficiency metrics. It calls for emotional intelligence, empathy, and careful stakeholder work. You must understand: Who stands to lose something in the transition? Who fears that their influence, role, or values will be diminished? Who is afraid of the public admitting that the old solution didn't work?

There are several ways to respond. One is to design innovations that *include* those tied to the old solution. Can you give them a new role? Retrain them to contribute differently? Recognize their past work as a stepping stone rather than a mistake? Building a narrative of continuity (“we are evolving, not abandoning”) can help stakeholders maintain dignity and a sense of purpose during change.

Another approach is to make small, safe-to-fail experiments alongside the current system. By demonstrating the effectiveness of the new solution in a limited context, you can build credibility and reduce the perceived threat. If possible, present

evidence not only on the benefits of the new solution, but also on the cost of maintaining the status quo—be it financial, reputational, or in lost public value.

You may also need to manage political optics. Sometimes it is necessary to “rebrand” a change as a renewal of the old idea rather than a replacement. Many successful reforms in government have relied on strategic ambiguity: doing something new under the name of something familiar.

And finally, you will need to be patient and persistent. Systems often resist because they are overloaded, under pressure, or lacking slack to try something new. Helping actors gain clarity, regain capacity, and build relationships of trust can make them more willing to let go of what no longer serves.

As a social innovation officer, one of your most powerful contributions is to help your system say: “We tried something, we learned, and now we will do better.” Releasing a dead horse is not about blame—it’s about learning. And systems that learn, change.

6. Align Actions and Outcomes through an Impact Logic Model

Now that you’ve explored your system, defined your boundaries, generated ideas, and aligned your innovation with system gaps—how do you demonstrate that your idea will actually lead to impact?

This is where you can use the method of building an impact logic model.

Many public initiatives fail because they jump straight to activities without articulating their logic of change. This leads to fragmentation, unrealistic expectations, and poor accountability. By working through an impact logic model, you create a shared roadmap that helps align partners, justify budget requests, and later measure success.

Critically, this tool also helps surface flawed assumptions. If you can’t clearly explain why your activity will lead to the outcome at beneficiary level, your idea needs further refinement—or perhaps a different lever of change entirely.

This is also the moment to ensure your impact logic model reflects your system analysis. For example:

- If your 5R framework showed a lack of resources in schools, your activity may need to include capacity-building.
- If your problem analysis revealed that youth are not motivated, your target group outcome must address behavioural change, not just access.
- If your earlier stakeholder map showed fragmented collaboration, then your activities may need to include coordination mechanisms and a stronger focus on target groups besides your beneficiary.

Your government department, like all others, is ultimately in service to society. This means that the "target group" is always external—the citizenry. The clearer you make that distinction, the better you can evaluate whether your activity delivers value.

The impact logic model is a visual or structured logic model that connects your activities to the changes you want to see in society. While often used in project planning or evaluation, here it plays a crucial role in shaping your idea during the design stage. It allows you to clarify your assumptions and test whether your activity is likely to generate your intended outcomes.

Let's revisit the adapted impact logic model used in this course:

- Impact: What long-term societal change do you want to contribute to?
- Outcome (beneficiary): What should change for the group who benefits from your service?
- Outcome (target group): What behaviours or contributions are needed from other system actors (e.g. teachers, IT departments, public servants)?

Output: Which (often visible) results of your activities can you detect?

Activity: What concrete service or action will you deliver?

- Inputs: What is needed to create the activities (money, people etc.)?
- Assumptions: Why do you believe your activity will trigger these changes?

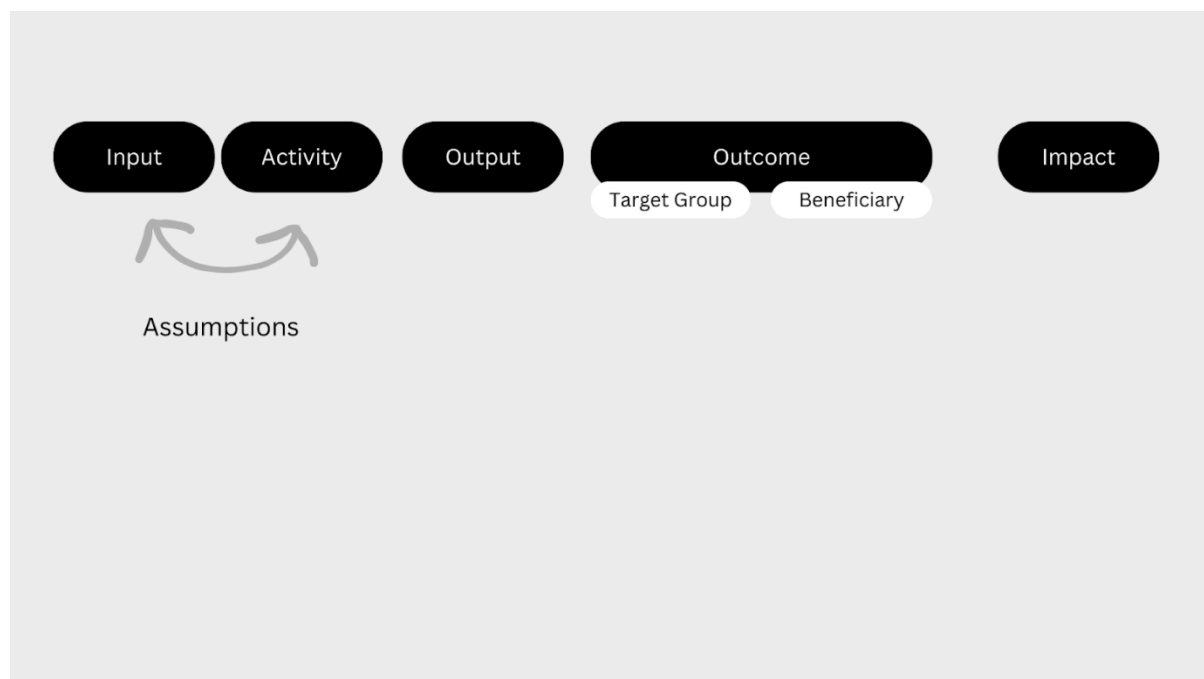


Figure 14 – Adapted Impact logic model¹³

¹³ Own illustration, adapted from Phineo, 2016, Social Impact Navigator,
https://www.phineo.org/uploads/Downloads/PHINEO_Social_Impact_Navigator.pdf

In the theory, an impact logic model is created backwards, starting with impact > Outcome > Output. An Impact could be "Youth in rural areas access employment opportunities equitably." You will notice that this is very close to your vision statement from before. Copy your vision to your impact goal, but make sure it is concrete enough (e.g. "no poverty" as the SDG 1 would be too broad).

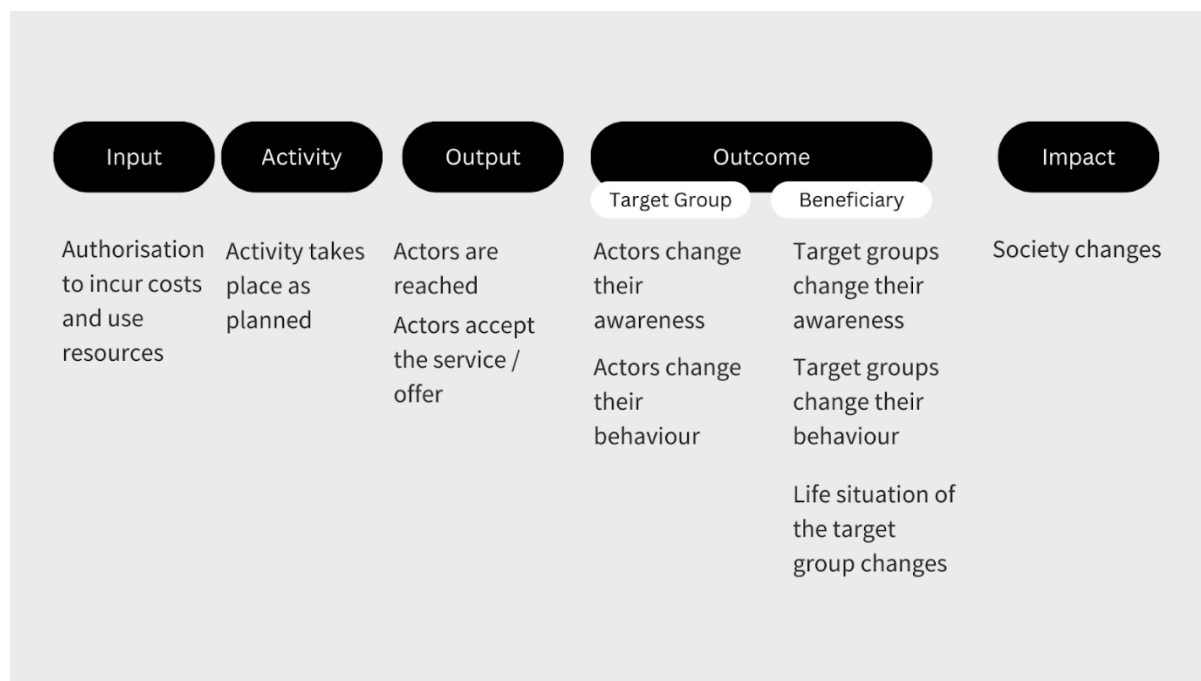


Figure 15 - Impact logic model in detail¹³

Then, define your beneficiary group. Typically, you can identify it by asking who is currently not living the life that you envision. For example, youth in your area might not be financially stable due to unemployment.

From the previous "Fast Idea Generator" exercise, you already have an idea of the output that you want to create. If unemployed youth are your beneficiary group, you might want to offer more vocational training, create a collaboration between different actors or create a marketing campaign.

Please note: When your chosen intervention is a system change activity, which moves existing actors in your ecosystem to behave differently, you mainly address the target group and not the end beneficiary. For this course, we have adapted the standard impact logic model to accommodate for that – by breaking the "outcome" column into two sections. Make sure to fill both columns in, creating changes for "target group" and for the "beneficiary".

For example: if your intervention moves teachers to act as job coaches, and reduce their own biases towards children from poor families (one of the system barriers, you

had identified), those teachers are your target group, but not your beneficiary. Your intervention moves through them to reach the ultimate target group.

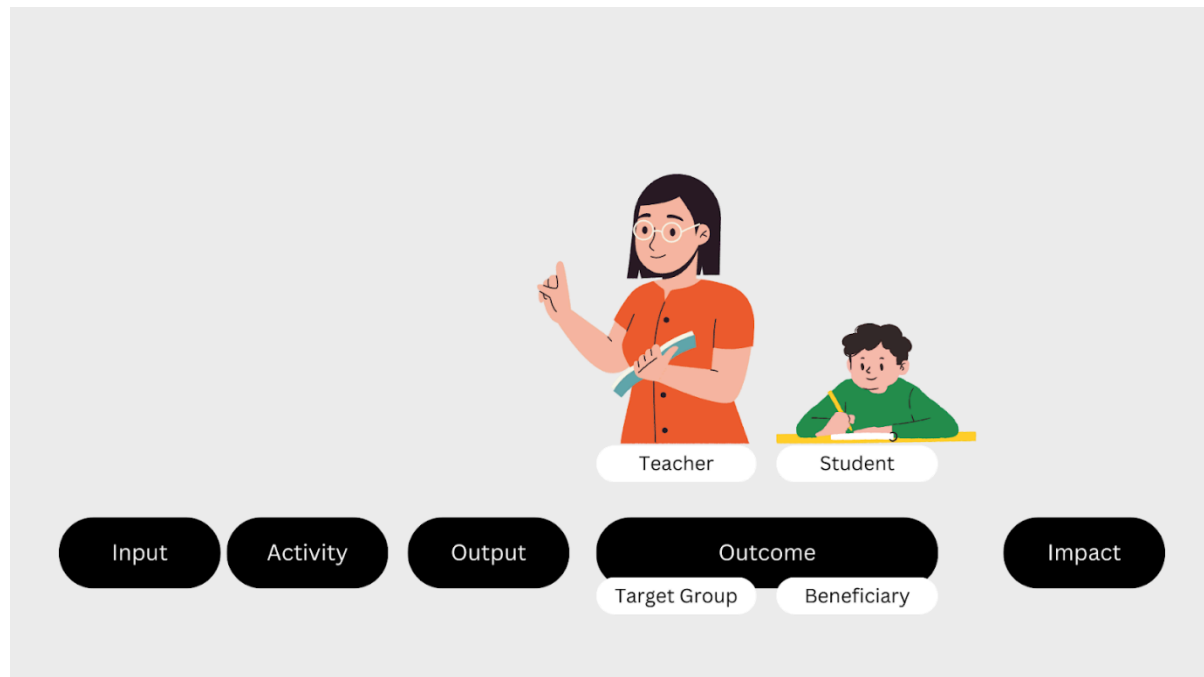


Figure 16 - Impact Logic model with Target Group Focus

7. Impact Measurement

Measuring impact is a crucial step in managing innovation effectively. It helps answer a simple yet powerful question: Are we creating the change we hoped for? But rather than starting from scratch, impact measurement should be built on the existing impact logic model you've already developed in earlier modules. This logic model outlines how your activities are meant to lead to outputs, outcomes, and long-term impact.

To measure progress at each stage of the logic model, we define indicators. An indicator is a clearly defined signpost that helps track whether a certain step in your logic is happening. Each indicator usually consists of:

- A metric (what you are measuring)
- A baseline (what the current situation is)
- A target value (what you want to reach)
- A data source (where and how you will get the information)
- A frequency of measurement (how often you will check progress)
- A responsible actor (who will track or report it)

For example, if one of your intended outcomes is to increase trust in public administration, a suitable indicator could be: “Percentage of citizens reporting high trust in local government in the annual public satisfaction survey.”

When defining indicators, a few common pitfalls should be avoided:

- Don't confuse activities with results (e.g. “number of workshops” is not the same as “people learned something”).
- Avoid indicators that are too broad or unclear (e.g. “Improve society” is not measurable).
- Don't pick indicators that are impossible to collect data for within your means.
- Avoid measuring only what is easy, rather than what is meaningful.

Your impact measurement approach does not have to be perfect or overly complex. Start with a few well-formulated indicators, test them, and refine them over time. The aim is not to prove, but to learn.

→ Further Reading: Doyle et al, OECD, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, The state of play and prospects for measuring innovation in the public sector, 2023, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/dca76af0-en>

7.1. Measuring to meet goals of Cost Saving, Efficiency or Effectiveness

Once you begin collecting data based on your indicators, you can use that information to assess not only whether your initiative is working, but how well it is working. Three key concepts help you with this: efficiency, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness. Each of these terms focuses on a different relationship between resources, actions, and results.

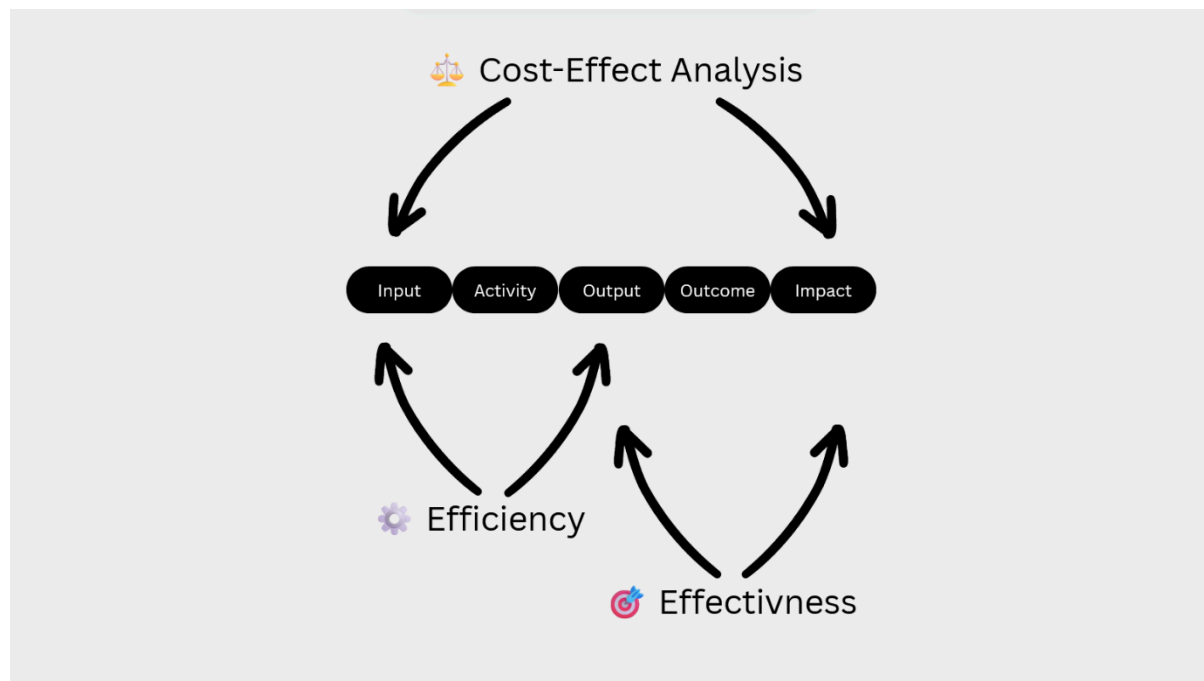


Figure 17 - Efficiency, Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness

Effectiveness tells you if your initiative is achieving its intended outcomes. For example, if your goal was to increase digital access in rural areas, and survey data shows a significant increase in users accessing public services online, then your intervention can be considered effective. The simplest calculation:

$$\text{Effectiveness} = (\text{Achieved result} / \text{Target result}) \times 100\%$$

If your target was 1,000 new users and you reached 800, your effectiveness would be 80%.

Efficiency focuses on the input-to-output ratio. It asks: how well are resources (money, time, staff) being used to produce outputs?

$$\text{Efficiency} = \text{Outputs} / \text{Inputs}$$

If you trained 500 people using €10,000, your efficiency would be 0.05 trainees per euro, or €20 per trainee. Comparing this to other efforts helps judge whether your method is resource-efficient.

Cost-effectiveness links costs directly to outcomes, not just outputs. It asks: how much did it cost to achieve a specific result?

$$\text{Cost-Effectiveness} = \text{Total Cost} / \text{Achieved Outcome}$$

For example, if your program helped 150 people gain employment and cost €75,000, then the cost-effectiveness is €500 per job placement.

These calculations do not replace judgment but support better decisions. They are especially useful when comparing different approaches to a similar problem, helping you refine or scale your intervention. Keep in mind, however, that some results—like

increased trust or community cohesion—are difficult to quantify, and not all value can (or should) be reduced to numbers.

8. Evidence-Based Policymaking and Impact Measurement

Throughout this course, we have emphasized the importance of clarity, goal orientation, and adaptation in public sector innovation. Yet, none of that can be sustained without a clear connection to evidence. Evidence-based policymaking is what ultimately bridges your intention and the legitimacy of your innovation. It moves the needle from well-meaning experimentation to credible, replicable practice.

Evidence-based innovation means using structured processes to observe, measure, and assess the effect of your initiative. This includes designing your impact logic model not only to show what you intend to do and why it matters, but also to define how success will be verified over time.

There are three basic approaches to generating such evidence. The first is structured data collection. This includes surveys, administrative data, interviews, and system-level indicators, collected through pre-defined intervals and linked to specific outcomes in your logic model. These should not be afterthoughts. They must be embedded early, ideally as part of the problem-solution alignment, so that the data you collect actually corresponds to what you seek to change.

The second is iterative evaluation, also known as developmental evaluation. This approach recognizes that in complex or adaptive systems, linear logic rarely holds. Instead of relying on one final ex-post assessment, your solution is continuously tested, adjusted, and evaluated in real time. This form of learning-oriented evaluation allows innovations to grow and scale while remaining responsive to their ecosystem.

The third and often overlooked method is to use citizen-generated evidence. Citizens are not just passive beneficiaries; they are experts of their lived experience. Whether through participatory budgeting, digital feedback platforms, community advisory boards, or crowd-sourced reporting, including this type of evidence increases legitimacy and responsiveness. Importantly, this must go beyond tokenism. The structures you use should be capable of translating input into action and of showing citizens that their contributions mattered.

Several good practices exist. For example, Youth-Check Parma was co-developed with LUISS University in Italy to assess the youth impact of local policies before implementation. It is based on structured criteria and offers feedback loops to local policymakers. The Project Center Timisoara in Romania integrates learning from policy implementation into legislative adjustments, helping to shift reactive policymaking into a more anticipatory mode. In Fix Cluj, outcome tracking and mentoring data are used to continually refine support services for young people, adjusting resource allocation and program design as new insights emerge.

→ Further Reading: on the Case of Youth-Check Parma in the Case Study file

To embed these practices into your own innovation, return to your impact logic model. You can now add a column next to each output, outcome, and impact level labelled “Evidence method”. Write down what form of evidence you will use to validate each stage: Is it survey-based? Administrative? Citizen-reported? Will it be collected regularly or at a milestone? This added structure helps to make your impact logic model a living tool—ready not only to convince others, but also to evolve as you learn.

9. Managing Risk in Government Innovation

Taking risks in the public sector is often met with hesitation. Unlike in start-ups or the private sector, government innovation involves not only public funds and legal frameworks but also high visibility and long chains of accountability. Career incentives, procurement constraints, and political oversight frequently discourage experimentation. And yet, any attempt to create social innovation within public institutions will carry some form of risk — be it reputational, financial, legal, or organizational.

Understanding risk doesn't mean avoiding it entirely. Instead, it means assessing the risk intelligently, communicating about it effectively, and developing strategies to reduce unnecessary exposure. In essence, risk can be broken into two dimensions: (1) the likelihood of failure, and (2) the severity of negative consequences if failure occurs. A project with a high likelihood of failure and significant consequences (e.g., legal non-compliance, financial loss) is clearly high-risk. However, a high likelihood of failure paired with minimal consequences might be an acceptable arena for testing and iteration.

This is why simply relying on intuition when evaluating risk is insufficient. In reality, perceived risk often doesn't match real risk. Intuition may overestimate how bad the failure would be (especially for junior staff) or underestimate the likelihood of failure (especially when one is overly enthusiastic about an idea). To counter this, public innovators should invest time in gathering evidence. Has a similar solution worked elsewhere? Can you speak to a peer in another agency or city? What data exists about unintended consequences?

Sometimes, the risk doesn't lie in the solution itself but in how others might perceive it. For example, proposing to shift responsibilities between departments may appear politically threatening to leadership, even if operationally sound. This is where de-risking becomes an essential part of your action strategy.

Keep in mind: taking no action at all might have higher risks involved than any of the actions, that are at your disposal.

Common de-risking strategies include:

- Involving leadership early to create shared ownership.
- Aligning your solution with existing political or strategic priorities.
- Starting with a limited pilot to minimize visibility and consequences.
- Preparing talking points for anticipated objections, especially around legality or funding.
- Reframing your idea in terms of continuity (not disruption) when addressing senior managers.

Importantly, de-risking also includes preparing for difficult conversations and building a support network. You may want to role-play difficult stakeholder conversations or present your idea first to a trusted ally. Creating internal feedback loops reduces risk before you go “live.”

The public sector has mechanisms for dealing with high-risk issues—emergency procedures, reviews, oversight boards. Yet these mechanisms are rarely activated for innovation, where soft risks like cultural resistance or reputational fear dominate. Learning to anticipate these risks and navigate them will mark the difference between a shelved idea and real impact.

10. Social Innovation through budgeting and law

Some of the most successful innovations don’t ignore law and budgets—they reshape how they’re used. Innovating in a rigid legal framework can be challenging. Therefore, it is important to establish spaces, where some legal restrictions are lifted in order to allow testing and experimentation. The same goes for budgets and the budgeting process. While most public budgets are created and approved by politicians, it can be helpful to include participation by citizens into the process to enable and foster change.

Ways to use law and budget for innovation:

Outcome-based procurement lets agencies buy results, not just services.

- Participatory budgeting allows citizens to decide how public funds are spent.
- Regulatory sandboxes create space to experiment under legal supervision.

These approaches show that laws and budgets are not just constraints, but can become levers for change. For example, if your organisation uses participatory budgeting for the first time, this in itself (the change in processes) is a social innovation too.

Since procurement has already been discussed in the previous chapters. Let’s explore ways to innovate.

10.1. Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a democratic innovation in public administration which allows residents to decide directly how to use part of a public budget. It is most commonly used in city administrations, to allow local citizens to have a say in local matters. While it has become more popular since first being established in Brazil in the 1980s, participatory budgeting is still rare and can be considered an internal social innovation if your department has never used it before and when the explicit intention is to improve societal outcomes.

The method works by inviting citizens to propose ideas or projects, evaluating their feasibility (often with administrative support), then voting on which proposals receive funding, and finally implementing the chosen ones. This cycle connects budgetary decisions more closely to public needs and builds legitimacy through transparency and inclusion. In using Participatory Budgeting internally, public servants need to set clear rules for participation, define how much budget is available, ensure accessibility of the process, and provide feedback or accountability so citizens see how decisions translate into action. It is also important to plan for administrative capacity, as it adds tasks for evaluation, communication, and project oversight.

Participatory budgeting has a long-standing history in Portugal, beginning in the city of Porto in 2001 and gradually expanding to municipalities throughout the country. In 2008, Lisbon became the first European capital to implement a participatory budgeting process, setting a precedent for other cities across Europe. What makes Portugal particularly noteworthy is its implementation of participatory budgeting at the national level, introducing three distinct programs: The Participatory Budget for Portugal, the Youth Participatory Budget, and the Participatory Budget for Schools. This marks the first nationwide adoption of participatory budgeting in Europe. The initiative stands out not only for its scale—allocating €3 million—but also for its innovative blend of digital participation tools and face-to-face public engagement¹⁴.

→ Further Reading: Check the Case Study Document for the Case “Participatory Budgeting in Timisoara, Romania”

10.2. Regulatory Sandboxes

Regulatory sandboxes are controlled testing environments in which public institutions permit innovators to trial new products, services, technologies or processes under regulatory supervision but with some flexibility or temporary exemptions from the current legal restrictions. When a department that has not previously used sandboxes establishes one with the explicit goal of improving societal outcomes — for example reducing barriers for social innovation, increasing

¹⁴ Martina Trettel, The Rise and Spread of Participatory Budgeting in European Cities, 2023, <https://www.eurac.edu/en/blogs/eureka/the-rise-and-spread-of-participatory-budgeting-in-european-cities>

inclusion, or improving access to services — that very creation of a sandbox can itself be seen as a social innovation.

Sandboxes allow experimentation: they give space to test ideas before adopting them formally, to observe unintended consequences, to adapt regulation, and then to scale successful approaches. In Germany, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) promotes “Regulatory Sandboxes – Testing Environments for Innovation and Regulation,”¹⁵ especially for digital and sustainable transformation, as well as the broader “Regulatory Sandboxes Strategy” launched in 2018. These aim to institutionalise experimentation clauses and legal exemptions so that new business models or regulatory approaches can be tried without immediately incurring legal or regulatory penalties. They also create structures for regulatory learning—regulators gather evidence about what works, innovators learn what compliance looks like, and policy can adapt.

To use regulatory sandboxes well in public administration, certain specifications matter: first, clear objectives must be established: what societal outcome is hoped for, which regulation is being tested against, what risks may be tolerable. Departments should define eligibility criteria for participants, time frames for experimentation and exit conditions. Legal certainty is important: **sandboxes do not abolish regulation but temporarily relax enforcement** or provide legally recognised exceptions under oversight. There should be transparency, with stakeholder involvement including public users, civil society, regulatory bodies, and evaluation built in. Monitoring and feedback loops are essential so that insights feed back into policy, regulation or permanent practice. Also, the sandbox should not be isolated; it should tie into broader strategic goals (digitalization, sustainability, inclusion) and clearly show how it connects to the department’s impact logic model or vision.

An example in the EU is Germany’s own “Regulatory Sandboxes Strategy,” as promoted by the BMWK. Germany sets up regulatory sandbox environments in many sectors including digital platforms, energy research, and sustainable innovation, supported by formal experimentation clauses. The German approach provides regional and national regulatory authorities with a legal framework to grant sandbox status to pilot projects, use legal exemptions, and gather regulatory and sectoral evidence that can later shape permanent regulation or public policy.

□ Further Reading: OECD, Regulatory Sandbox Toolkit, A Comprehensive Guide for Regulators to Establish and Manage Regulatory Sandboxes Effectively, 2025, https://digital.gob.es/content/dam/portal-mtdfp/funcion-publica/gobernanza-publica/simplificacion/doc-referencia/RegulatorySandboxToolkit_OECD-en.pdf

11. Legal and Financial Literacy for Public Sector Innovation

¹⁵ Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, <https://www.bundeswirtschaftsministerium.de/Redaktion/EN/Dossier/regulatory-sandboxes.html>

Every solution you design as a Social Innovation Officer will encounter legal frameworks and public budgets. Understanding where your innovation intersects with existing laws, regulations, and financial structures is not only necessary to navigate constraints; it's essential to uncover hidden opportunities for change.

11.1. Mapping the Budget Landscape

Innovation also requires resources, and in government, that means public budgets. Even if you're not involved in financial management, understanding where money flows—and doesn't—can help you align your solution to real funding opportunities.

Start by asking:

- Which budget lines are relevant to the issue your innovation addresses?
- Who controls those funds—your team, another agency, or a higher-level authority?
- Is there a current budget process (e.g. annual planning, participatory budgeting) where new ideas can be proposed?

Often, solutions fail not because they are bad ideas, but because they don't fit existing budget cycles or categories. Sometimes, it's a matter of timing—your idea might only be fundable in the next fiscal year. Other times, it might fit better under a different department's budget, requiring collaboration or cross-silo coordination.

→ Further Reading: Wittmayer et al, 2024, Advancing the understanding of social innovation in sustainability transitions: exploring processes, politics, and policies for accelerating transitions, available at:

https://www.ioew.de/fileadmin/user_upload/BILDER_und_Downloaddateien/Publikationen/2024/Wittmayer_Hielscher_et-al_2024_Advancing-the-understanding-of-social-innovation-in-sustainability.pdf

11.2. Where Does Your Innovation Touch the Law?

Innovations in public administration rarely exist outside the law. On the contrary, they often exist *because* of it—or are blocked *by* it. Some legal constraints are obvious (e.g. procurement rules, social protection laws), but many are embedded deeply in administrative routines, sector-specific regulations, or legacy legislation.

To begin, identify the relevant legal areas your innovation touches. These might be different from the legal constraints we have found before (because those analysed “what is” and here we now look at your solution and “what could be”). Ask yourself:

- Does your innovation require new legal permissions (e.g. sharing data, piloting a new service)?
- Could it be implemented through a reinterpretation of existing rules (e.g. flexible use of staff roles)?

- Are there precedents in other jurisdictions that could help you justify or legitimize your approach?

If you are not a legal expert you can still engage with colleagues from legal departments early on. Present your idea, and ask *what would need to be true* for it to happen within legal boundaries. Often, the law is not as rigid as you think. Sometimes, innovation comes from reinterpreting existing legal space creatively and responsibly.

Module 7: Taking Action – Organisational Leadership

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Topics Covered

- 3. Tools and Methodology in SI
- 4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
- 5. Principles and practices of design for policy

Topics Not Covered

- 1. Social Innovation Theory
- 2. Social Transformation Theory
- 6. Economic strength and financial variable
- 7. Labour and social responsibility
- 8. Urban and rural regeneration
- 9. Public procurement

Learning objectives Module 7

Module 7 explores how to engage citizens and stakeholders meaningfully in the design of social innovations. It addresses the spectrum of participation, the mental models that can enable or limit collaboration, and how partnerships can be managed for effective co-creation. It also emphasizes planning for scaling, thinking about long-term change through foresight, building alliances, and communicating impact persuasively. The module builds directly on the systemic understanding developed earlier and prepares learners to plan the embedding of their social innovation into the organisational architecture for long term strategies of innovation culture.

Text content for moodle platform

1. Why Letting Go is So Hard

One of the most overlooked aspects of social innovation is the emotional and institutional difficulty of letting go of the old ways. Your solution might not face resistance because it's "bad" but because it implies that the current model is outdated. That's a hard truth to accept, especially for those who built or defended the current system.

Anticipating resistance is not about avoiding conflict. It's about being strategic, respectful, and proactive. Understanding people's motivations and roles—your target groups—helps you design smarter engagements, trainings, and messaging. You'll stop pushing change onto people, and start creating the conditions that invite them into the change.

2. Organizational Ambidexterity and Innovation Structures

In order to implement meaningful change within public administration, it is not enough to identify the right solution; the organizational environment must also be capable of supporting innovation alongside its regular operations. This is where the concept of organizational ambidexterity becomes crucial. In simple terms, ambidexterity refers to the ability of an organization to balance two seemingly opposing needs: the ability to maintain and execute its current processes reliably (often called exploitation) and the ability to explore new ideas, approaches, and innovations (exploration).

In human biology, ambidexterity means being equally capable with both hands. In organizational terms, it means managing both the "old" and the "new" at the same time. Many public institutions struggle with this balance. They are excellent at routine delivery of services, but often less flexible when it comes to experimenting with new ways of doing things. As a Social Innovation Officer, you may find that the routines and rules of your department support only the status quo. However, innovation demands space for experimentation, creativity, and sometimes even failure.

There are two main ways organizations try to achieve ambidexterity. One is time-based: creating protected time within an individual's workload to explore new ideas. This is especially helpful when individuals already possess the institutional knowledge and can apply it directly to innovation efforts. The other is team-based: setting up a separate unit or innovation lab that operates with different rules and freedom to explore, while the rest of the organization maintains daily operations. Both models have their strengths and challenges, and the choice often depends on institutional culture, size, and resources.

Whichever structure is chosen, it is essential that public sector organizations recognize that stability and experimentation are not mutually exclusive. They must

coexist. The service delivery side of government must maintain safety, legality, and continuity. But for complex social problems—especially those without a precedent or clear solution—the organization also needs room to imagine, prototype, and test. This duality is not easy to manage, but it is vital.

For social innovators within government, understanding your institution's level of ambidexterity can help you decide whether you need to build alliances, request a special project space, or carve out protected time. You might not be able to change the overall organizational structure immediately, but you can influence how your own role is shaped to accommodate both operational responsibility and innovative potential. Innovation is not just about ideas—it's also about structure.

3. Anticipating resistance and readiness for change

Designing a good solution is not only about getting the technical aspects right. It's also about understanding who will implement it, who will need to change their behaviour, and who might resist—intentionally or unintentionally. Social innovation in public administration means navigating a complex web of people, roles, routines, and beliefs.

Let's start with roles. You already identified your beneficiaries—the people in society who will ultimately benefit from your innovation. But now, as you shape your idea further, you must ask: Who is the target group of your intervention? These are the people or institutions whose behaviour, routines, or mindset your solution must influence to reach your impact goals.

If your intervention improves job access for young people, then youth are your beneficiaries. But if your solution involves teachers conducting job-readiness sessions, or the IT department building a job-matching app, then they are your target group. It's their actions that will bring your solution to life. Be as specific as possible when identifying this group.

To support successful change, you must go one step further: anticipate resistance.

Public servants are not resistant to change because they are lazy or obstructive. Often, they are simply not ready—not because they don't want to help, but because they are overburdened, under-resourced, or operating within tight rules. Sometimes, they haven't been asked what they think—or worse, are being asked to do something that contradicts how they understand their role.

Before engaging them, reflect on these questions:

- What does this person or team perceive to be their main role in the system?
- What will they lose if the innovation succeeds (status, budget, simplicity)?
- What might they gain (recognition, autonomy, improved outcomes)?
- Will they need to change their behaviour, beliefs, or skills?

- Are you supporting that change—or just asking for it?

If someone sees their role as “implementing the law,” then proposing a participatory, flexible co-design process may create internal conflict. You will need to offer a narrative or training that helps them reconcile this shift. They need to see themselves as part of the solution, not an obstacle. → Further Reading: OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI): Toolkit on Behavioural Insights in Public Administration

4. Trust-Building in Public Sector Innovation

Trust is often the hidden infrastructure behind any successful social innovation. While it rarely appears in funding proposals or government regulations, it is a vital condition for meaningful collaboration, sustained participation, and long-term legitimacy. In the context of public sector innovation, trust must operate on two levels: personal and institutional. A social innovation officer must understand both to navigate change effectively.

Personal trust emerges between individuals. It is built over time and rests on three core pillars: knowing someone, being able to rely on them consistently, and experiencing them as dependable when something new is asked of them. Brené Brown, in her research on vulnerability and trust, outlines how trust grows in small moments—when people are seen, heard, and supported. In public administration, this means that personal trust between colleagues, departments, or between civil servants and citizens is not built through slogans or mission statements. It is built when promises are kept, information is shared transparently, and respect is shown even during disagreement. A case manager who returns a citizen’s call, follows up on a question, or takes responsibility for a mistake helps build this kind of trust. These personal relationships can enable innovation even in rigid institutional environments.

Institutional trust, on the other hand, refers to the trust that citizens (or stakeholders) place in a public body. It is not dependent on one individual but on the perceived integrity, reliability, and fairness of the organization as a whole. This kind of trust is fragile and difficult to rebuild once broken. Studies have shown that institutional trust is strongly shaped by perceived competence (can the institution deliver on its goals?), transparency (are processes understandable and predictable?), and fairness (do people believe they are being treated equally?). Public innovators often underestimate how innovation processes—especially those involving co-creation or experimentation—can either strengthen or undermine this kind of trust. For instance, if a municipality invites citizens to co-design a new service but does not actually implement any of the suggestions, trust can erode.

Trust is particularly important when innovations require behaviour change, shared ownership, or participation from groups who have historically been excluded or underserved. Without trust, even technically excellent ideas may fail to gain traction. This is why building trust must be seen as a strategic activity, not a soft add-on.

Public sector innovators can take concrete steps to build trust. Internally, this means creating safe spaces where staff can speak honestly, share concerns, and explore new ideas without fear of punishment. Externally, this means engaging stakeholders early, being clear about what is negotiable and what is not, and delivering on promises, however small.

In essence, trust is not only a precondition for social innovation—it is also an outcome. When institutions innovate well, they don't just improve a service or reduce costs; they also build the credibility and confidence needed to innovate again in the future.

□ Further Reading: Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead* (the book) as well as the Workbook and Exercises here <https://brenebrown.com/hubs/dare-to-lead/>

5. Opening up: How Organisations learn from the outside

Introducing innovation into public administration often requires a fundamental rethinking of how citizens and other stakeholders are involved in shaping policies and services. Participation is not just a democratic ideal—it is a practical strategy for building trust, increasing effectiveness, and ensuring long-term relevance. But while public sector professionals often agree on the value of participation in theory, it is in practice that the real challenges and opportunities can emerge.

At its core, citizen participation invites institutions to rethink their own position in the system. It challenges the assumption that expertise resides only within government, and opens the door for other forms of knowledge—lived experience, local context, cultural insight—to play a shaping role in how solutions are defined and delivered. This shift is deeply connected to the broader themes of this module: building trust, enabling ambidexterity, and managing change in complex environments.

Meaningful participation, however, cannot be improvised. It requires clarity about who is involved, what kind of influence they will have, and how this will affect implementation. When done poorly, participation can backfire—creating frustration, disengagement, or even resistance. When done well, it strengthens the legitimacy of innovations, aligns diverse interests, and builds the kind of shared ownership that is essential for scaling and sustainability. One of the most important insights in true engagement is that not all stakeholders need to be engaged at the same level—and not all challenges require the same depth of collaboration.

The **“5 Levels of Engagement”** framework can help public innovators think more strategically about when and how to invite participation:

- Level 1: Inform – “I was updated on a decision.”
- Level 2: Consult – “I shared my experience with the problem.”
- Level 3: Involve – “My input was included in the analysis.”

- Level 4: Collaborate – “All our needs and interests are shaping the solutions.”
- Level 5: Co-Create – “We did it all together, including deciding the vision and goals.”

5.1. Rethinking internal assumptions

Before looking outward, it is essential to examine the internal mental models that shape how participation is understood within the public institution. Many organisations operate with long-standing assumptions: that citizens must earn access through compliance, that public services are delivered to people rather than with them, or that innovation must be technically perfect before it is publicly discussed. These assumptions are often invisible, embedded in routines, language, and policy frameworks.

Challenging them is not about blame—it’s about awareness. Institutional culture is powerful, but not fixed. By surfacing and discussing these internal narratives, teams can begin to imagine new ways of relating to citizens: as co-thinkers, as partners, and as sources of innovation in their own right.

This work starts with small shifts. A procurement officer might ask whether tenders could better reflect user needs. A team lead might reconsider how success is defined—not only by efficiency, but by responsiveness or satisfaction. A policy designer might question whether the problem definition already excludes certain groups. Rethinking participation begins by rethinking ourselves.

5.2. Building bridges to external innovators

Public administrations do not have to build innovation alone. Across Europe, civil society actors, social entrepreneurs, foundations, and grassroots organizations are already experimenting with solutions to public challenges. These actors often work closer to the people affected, test ideas with more agility, and bring in perspectives that are otherwise missing in formal policy cycles.

Rather than viewing these organizations as implementers or critics, governments can engage them as innovation partners. This requires more than contracting—it involves relationship-building, openness to feedback, and recognition of the value these actors bring.

Social Innovation Officers are well-positioned to act as bridge-builders between internal structures and external energy. This might mean convening shared workshops, exploring joint impact indicators, or adapting internal procedures to better align with partner timelines and approaches. It also means listening deeply and being willing to adjust—not just expecting others to align with government rhythms.

Building these bridges expands the capacity of government to innovate—not by outsourcing responsibility, but by weaving together the strengths of different parts

of the system. When institutions become better at listening, collaborating, and sharing authorship, participation becomes more than a method—it becomes a mindset

6. Planning for Scaling

One of the most common pitfalls in public sector innovation is mistaking a pilot project for a viable long-term solution. Pilots are meant to test new ideas—but if those ideas can't be scaled, either due to cost, capacity, or legal rigidity, then the pilot becomes little more than a proof of concept with no real impact on the system.

Scalability must be designed from the start, not as an afterthought. When choosing or designing your intervention, ask yourself: “If this works, can we realistically make it happen at scale within our system?” If the answer is “no,” then you may need to redesign or rethink the approach altogether.

Take, for example, a vocational training program that assigns a personal coach to every unemployed youth. In a pilot with 25 young people, this might show excellent results. But in a region with 10,000 unemployed youths, the staffing and funding needed to maintain the same ratio is simply not feasible. The idea may still have value, but its scaling model must be redesigned—perhaps by training group facilitators, using digital tools, or building peer support structures.

In government, the triangle of constraints—time, quality, and money—is always at play. A social innovation process can increase quality (for instance, by involving users in co-creation), but this often takes more time and resources. Policymakers and citizens may not be willing to wait. This creates a tension between what's desirable, what's affordable, and what's politically feasible. Citizens may prefer a fast and visible improvement—even if it's not perfect—over a slow and well-researched solution. Understanding where to compromise, and where not to, is part of leading systemic change.

Scaling also depends on who owns the innovation. If your solution ultimately requires citizens to adopt new behaviours or practices, they must be included from the beginning. Research shows that deep, systemic challenges—like poverty, exclusion, or environmental degradation—require higher levels of engagement (Levels 4 or 5 engagement to Collaborate or to Co-Create). These are models of collaboration and shared ownership, not just participation in a consultation.

Scaling often fails because policymakers forget that rural areas have different infrastructures, networks, and policy attention than cities. Designing for scale means considering different environments and resource levels, including rural and underserved regions.

→ Further Reading: UpSocial, [Scaling Social Innovation \(document in Spanish “Estándares de análisis de innovaciones sociales”\)](#),

https://www.upsocial.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/upsocial_estandares_esp_2019_06_1.pdf

7. Future Foresight and Strategic Thinking

Social innovation in public administration is not just about fixing what is broken today—it's also about anticipating what challenges lie ahead. Future foresight is the practice of exploring possible, probable, and preferable futures to inform better decisions in the present. It helps public servants avoid short-sighted solutions and instead align innovations with long-term shifts in society, technology, and the environment.

Foresight is not the same as prediction. You're not trying to guess exactly what will happen. Instead, you're engaging in structured imagination to prepare for multiple possibilities. This is especially important in complex systems, where one small change can have unpredictable ripple effects.

Foresight exercises can include trend analysis, scenario planning, horizon scanning, and back casting. For example, if you are working on youth employment, a foresight approach might ask:

- How might automation reshape entry-level jobs in 10 years?
- What values will Gen Z and Gen Alpha prioritize in their careers?
- How might climate-related migration change local labour markets?

From these prompts, you could create several future scenarios: one in which youth work exclusively in remote gig platforms; one in which climate jobs surge; one in which mental health becomes the top employment barrier. You can then test your proposed solution against these future worlds. Will it still be relevant? Scalable? Resilient?

Governments that embrace foresight often find themselves better prepared for shocks—such as pandemics, conflicts, or economic downturns. The COVID-19 crisis revealed the lack of strategic foresight in many public systems. Crisis responses had to be built from scratch, rather than adapted from already-modelled scenarios.

Foresight also builds legitimacy. Citizens are more likely to trust innovations that feel proactive rather than reactive. Involving communities in co-creating future visions also strengthens democratic participation and aligns action with public values.

In practice, foresight doesn't need to be overly technical. It can be as simple as asking “What might this look like in 5–10 years?” during your next planning session. Or hosting a “future walkthrough” where stakeholders roleplay a version of the system in 2035.

As a Social Innovation Officer, you can integrate foresight by:

- Including long-term trends in your system analysis
- Testing your solutions against multiple future scenarios
- Building adaptive capacity into your plans (so they can change as the world does)
- Co-creating futures with citizens and stakeholders

The goal is not to “future-proof” your idea entirely, but to make it more *future-aware*—open to change and ready to evolve.

→ Further Reading: More tools can be found in the toolbox in this document, such as Horizon Scanning or Trend Analysis: Krishnan et al., UNDP, Foresight Playbook for Governance,

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-08/UNDP-RBAP-Foresight-Playbook-2022.pdf>

8. Building Alliances for long term success

Since we are working with large scale societal challenges and want to create social innovations, which match this scale – it is advisable to find allies and build alliances. Firstly, this will help you to find additional resources and peers for the innovation journey. And secondly, you might need other organisations for a successful implementation of your idea.

8.1. Building Alliances internally

Social innovation within government doesn't happen in isolation, as we have discovered in the past modules. Even the best systemic insights, the clearest 5R map, and the strongest mission will fall flat if you don't have allies to work with. That's because the kinds of changes social innovators pursue — rethinking roles, shifting relationships, challenging existing rules — affect real people, real budgets, and real power.

This means that one of your key responsibilities as a Social Innovation Officer is to build support — not only with those who already agree with you, but also with those who might be neutral, sceptical, or initially resistant. You may not be in a position to make structural changes on your own. But you can often influence others, if you find ways to collaborate. Allies can:

- Open access to data or resources you don't control.
- Provide legitimacy or political cover.
- Help co-create and implement solutions.
- Act as amplifiers of your message or model.

In public systems, even a small shift often requires cross-department coordination or stakeholder alignment. The earlier you start building trust and finding allies, the smoother your path will be when change becomes possible.

Supporters from within your administration could include:

- Colleagues in other departments with shared goals.
- Mid-level managers who are open to experimentation.
- Elected officials seeking practical impact stories.

Even someone who was not in your original stakeholder map might become a crucial supporter once your framing of the issue becomes clearer. If you are unsure where to start, the 5R map should already include useful starting points.

8.2. Finding Allies outside government

After finding your problem statement, you might feel a bit overwhelmed or think that it will be impossible for you to fix a problem at that scale. If that is the case, you are on the right track. We identify problems at scale, because they are those worthy to be tackled, and will truly make a difference in people's lives. It will be easy to get frustrated by your limited power to "solve" the problem in its entirety, therefore we will next look at other actors involved. You will see that many more organisations, civil society actors, foundations and other government organisations are working on the same problem. Identifying them can help in feeling less lonely, making clear what element of the problem is already "taken care of" and where your strengths and levers can make the biggest impact.

Many Social Innovators bring a varied background, allowing them to bridge sectors and translate complex ideas into actionable strategies. Understanding data and using evidence-based thinking is another shared trait, which is particularly emphasised where the innovation is used to guide political or institutional choices. Strategic communication is used for storytelling and conveying the value of the innovation to both internal and external stakeholders. Another important skill is the systemic vision of the Social Innovator, allowing to go beyond isolated interventions and embedding the innovation into broader institutional frameworks.

Finding allies from different fields of work can also help you to bring in other perspectives. Social Innovations are particularly strong, when multiple viewpoints are included. If you yourself bring multiple perspectives, for example because you worked different jobs in different sectors before becoming a public servant, you personally can bring this multitude of insights. If you have always worked as a public servant, you might want to find allies that can add to your perspective.

→ Further Reading: The Better Politics Foundation has a variety of communities Community of Practices, Apolitical Co., <https://apolitical.co/en/communities>

9. Storytelling and Communicating Impact

Data is not always enough. When working in government, even the most detailed analysis or thorough documentation might not move hearts—or even budgets. What often creates momentum is a compelling story. As a Social Innovation Officer, storytelling is not about embellishment, but about structuring your evidence and message so that others can connect with it and support your efforts.

Storytelling is particularly powerful when you are dealing with complexity. It can humanize the numbers, clarify your goals, and motivate others to act. Your story can help someone understand why a change is needed—even if they don't have the same technical background or problem insight as you do.

The most effective stories follow a simple arc:

- A starting point – Show how things are now. Use specific examples, ideally from real people (anonymized if necessary).
- A turning point – Explain the challenge or change that made you re-think the situation. This might be a data point, a stakeholder interview, or a systemic insight.
- A new vision – Describe the positive change you are working toward. Anchor this in your vision and mission statement.
- An invitation to act – Tell your audience what they can do to help. This could be an endorsement, collaboration, funding, or simply staying informed.

For example, same-sex marriage in the United States was stuck for years in a legal-political deadlock. Advocates long argued that “same sex marriage is a human right,” but failed to gain broad support or shift the broader public narrative. After a change in how the story was told, it connected better to already existing cultural beliefs. Campaigners began focusing on love, with slogans like “Let people marry who they love.” This emotional shift made it easier for people to connect with the issue—and led to a legal breakthrough.

In public administration, your story might not be about love, but the same principle applies. It should appeal to human experience, not just institutional logic. It should show how your solution benefits the beneficiary—not just ticks a policy box.

This becomes especially important when communicating with citizens. If you want them to trust your solution, you need to show that you understand their lives and needs. A good story helps you build this bridge.

And remember: stories are not only told outwards. Internal storytelling—in team meetings, memos, or informal conversations—is just as important. It helps align your colleagues and creates a shared sense of purpose.

→ Further Reading: Centre for Public Impact, Storytelling,
<https://centreforpublicimpact.org/our-work/storytelling/>

→ Further Reading: Annie Neimand, How to Tell Real Stories About Impact,
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_to_tell_real_stories_about_impact

Module 8: Adjusting

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Topics Covered

1. Social Innovation Theory
2. Social Transformation Theory
5. Principles and practices of design for policy
8. Urban and rural regeneration

Topics Not Covered

3. Tools and Methodology in SI
4. Impact assessment tools and methodologies
6. Economic strength and financial variable
7. Labour and social responsibility
9. Public procurement

Learning objectives Module 8

Module 8 brings together everything learners have covered so far and focuses on one of the most critical and difficult parts of public sector innovation: taking action in the face of complexity. It equips participants to deal with conflicting goals, stalled systems, and the emotional burden of driving change. Key themes include conflict-resilient decision-making, adaptive planning, engaging broader ecosystems, embedding innovation in daily work, and building trust through communication. This module supports public servants in sustaining momentum, adjusting strategy, and becoming long-term changemakers within and beyond their institutions.

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1. Testing Your Solution Within the System

Throughout this course, you've explored the system around your chosen societal problem. You've identified actors, rules, relationships, and resources. Now it's time to bring that systems understanding together and use it to test your solution idea against the realities of your organisation and the system at large.

Systems analysis is a practical habit: every time you test or adapt your idea, you're working with the system—and every time you adjust your system view, you're improving your innovation. Over time you will also collect more information, so that you can improve your understanding of the system and better anticipate what solution might work.

You don't have to get everything right the first time. Innovation means starting with what's possible, then learning and adjusting. If your solution doesn't move the system as expected, you can pivot. There are always other levers to pull—different actors to engage, different entry points to explore.

1.1. Decision-Making in the Face of Conflicting Goals

One of the most difficult aspects of public innovation is not coming up with ideas—it is making decisions when goals are unclear or even in conflict. The further a project moves from analysis into action, the more decision-making becomes central. This is particularly true in public administration, where initiatives often involve many stakeholders, overlapping responsibilities, and competing interests.

It might sound obvious, but decisions need to be taken. And yet, many promising ideas get stuck because nobody wants to make a call that risks conflict. The desire to preserve harmony can easily become a barrier to progress. Instead of resolving tensions, teams postpone decisions, wait for perfect conditions, or seek endless alignment. Over time, this leads to stagnation—and the original intention behind an innovation is quietly abandoned.

To move forward, it is necessary to acknowledge that goal conflicts are part of the process. These can occur between political and administrative aims, between individual motivations and institutional missions, or even within the same impact logic model. For example, one team might aim to reduce public costs (an input goal), while another pushes for broader reach (an output goal), and a third demands high quality outcomes. Each of these goals is valid—but when treated as equally urgent without prioritisation, they cancel each other out.

Goals might also conflict on the level of outcome goals: While the department of environmental affairs tries to save a natural park from interference, the department of infrastructure wants to build a new solar energy park there. While both goals have

their valid aim, and are both serving the public at large, a deeper look is necessary to identify if a solution can be found that can serve both goals.

The challenge for social innovators is not to avoid these tensions but to learn how to make decisions despite them. One helpful approach is to make conflicting goals visible and explicit early on. Drawing a map of competing interests, as practiced in earlier modules, allows teams to see where their priorities clash or align. But mapping is not enough on its own. At some point, choices must be made.

A good decision-making process often includes asking: what goal are we optimising for right now? It might be that, in the short term, cost reduction takes precedence. Or that trust-building with citizens is more important than speed. Whatever the answer, it should be openly named and re-evaluated over time.

Most importantly, the ability to take decisions—even difficult ones—should be protected within the organisation. This means building a culture that allows disagreement without punishment, that supports iterative learning, and that trusts people to try, fail, and adjust. Without this, the fear of conflict will quietly take over, and teams will lose the energy to act. Depending on your role in the organisation, make sure that you are equipped for this type of conflict: whether it happens in the structure “above” you (aka your bosses), in the same hierarchy (your peers) or below (your team). If you are leading a team, you can actively work towards allowing conflict to happen as a positive engine for change.

1.2. When Government Isn’t Ready, but Change Is Still Needed

Even with the best preparation, alignment, and persistence, sometimes change inside government simply stalls. Political will might shift. Leadership might change. Budgets might disappear. Or your organisation might just not be ready yet. That doesn’t mean your innovation journey has to stop. In these moments, it’s important to remember: social innovation doesn’t have to come from inside government alone.

Many important changes are initiated by actors working alongside public institutions: social enterprises, community organisations or citizen initiatives. These actors are often more agile, closer to the issue, and able to take different kinds of risks. As a public servant, you still have an important role to play—by working with and supporting these actors, who share your desired impact goal.

You can do this in multiple ways:

- Share your insights and data to help others design better solutions. What you’ve learned about the problem context is valuable.
- Offer access, visibility, or introductions. Sometimes the biggest contribution you can make is to open a door, invite someone into a space, or connect them to someone with influence.

- Use your convening power. As a public servant, you have legitimacy. You can help frame the issue, bring stakeholders together, or lend credibility to an idea by standing next to it.
- Create safe pilots or experiments with external actors. These often require fewer formal approvals but can demonstrate real value and gather evidence for broader uptake.

In short, don't wait for perfect alignment inside your system. Leverage the full ecosystem. Often, the most powerful innovations grow at the edge, where government learns to collaborate with civil society, academia, and the private sector. You can be the bridge.

□ Further Reading: Ashoka, Self-paced free online course, Introduction to Leading Multi-Stakeholder Collaborations,
<https://ashokacommunity.thinkific.com/courses/multistakeholdercollab-sp>

1.3. Staying Connected: Learning from Others, Sharing Your Practice

Innovation in public administration is rarely a solo journey. The challenges are too complex, and the knowledge is too scattered. What makes the difference is often your ability to stay connected—to peers, to other administrations, and to actors outside government who can share their experiences, tools, and encouragement.

Learning does not end with this course. In fact, some of the most important lessons will come in the weeks and months after, when you try to apply what you've learned. But you don't have to start from zero every time. Many other public innovators are walking a similar path—some a few steps ahead, others just beginning.

Here are a few ways to stay connected and deepen your practice:

Peer Networks

Look for professional networks focused on innovation in government. These are excellent places to exchange ideas, find collaborators, and get feedback:

- OPSI (OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation) – offers case studies, events, and tools.
- City Lab Berlin or Co:Lab Denmark – offer localised spaces for public sector experimentation and reflection.
- National reform labs or living labs – often hosted by ministries, regional authorities, or universities.
- The Communities of Practice of the Better Politics Foundation has a variety of topics and connect worldwide <https://apolitical.co/en/communities>

Events and Communities

- Attend public innovation meetups, conferences, or workshops. You'll often meet people working on similar challenges with different tools.
- Look for online forums or LinkedIn groups where policy professionals and social innovators share experiences.

Resources and Tools

Keep a library of tools and frameworks that worked for you—and explore new ones regularly. For example:

- Ashoka's courses on collaboration and systems change
- Practical tools from Nesta UK on collective intelligence, public problem solving, or participatory methods
- IRIS+ Catalogue from GIIN to explore structured impact measurement and sustainable investment indicators

Storytelling and Sharing

You don't need to wait for a perfect success to tell your story. Documenting your journey—the questions you asked, the pivots you made, the partners you involved—is valuable for others. Consider:

- Sharing internally in your department
- Writing a short blog post or article
- Presenting at a peer exchange session

When you share, you build legitimacy for innovation in your organisation. You also position yourself within the broader movement of practitioners who are slowly transforming the culture of public administration.

Taking the Next Step: Embedding Innovation as a Continuous Practice

You've come a long way. Throughout this course, you've mapped problems, explored systems, tested new ideas, and built a deeper understanding of social innovation within public administration. Now comes the real challenge: turning this learning into lasting change—first in your work, then in your organisation.

Innovation is not a one-time project or a temporary spark of creativity. It is a continuous process of learning, adapting, and improving. That's why your first step after this course should be simple and immediate: take action. Start small, but be deliberate.

Begin by asking yourself: What is one thing I can do this week to make progress on my innovation journey?

That might mean:

- Presenting your impact logic model to your team and inviting feedback.
- Testing one small part of your planned solution.
- Having a conversation with a stakeholder you've never collaborated with before.

0. Planning the Months Ahead

To build momentum, set yourself short- and medium-term goals. Think about the next six months not as a fixed plan, but as a learning cycle. What can you observe, test, and improve?

Some suggestions:

Month 1–2: Share your innovation idea internally. Use the IAOOI impact logic model or a visual sketch to help others understand it.

Month 3–4: Begin testing a component of your solution on a small scale. Reflect on the reactions and data you gather.

Month 5–6: Use those insights to iterate. Update your goals, adjust your timeline, and look for new partners.

Innovation becomes sustainable when it is embedded in your everyday work, not added as extra weight.

2.1. Making Innovation a Habit

To keep going, you'll need more than a plan—you'll need rhythm, reflection, and support.

Try this:

Build a monthly check-in for yourself: What progress have I made? What surprised me? What will I do differently next month?

Schedule a regular exchange with a peer: Someone you met during this course or a colleague who also wants to work differently.

Return to the exercises in your workbook: Many of them are designed to be used more than once—especially as your understanding and your context evolve.

Remember: even if your first solution doesn't take off, you've built the skills to shift perspective, revisit the system, and try another lever.

2.2. Organisational Readiness

Lastly, reflect on your organisation. Are you surrounded by structures that support change—or ones that resist it?

In earlier modules, you analysed systems using tools like the 5R Framework, Daniela Papi's circles of impact, and system conditions. Now, take a fresh look at your context:

- Are there allies with whom you could form a core innovation group?
- Is there a small budget you can use flexibly?
- Can you identify a leader who might champion your approach?

Even when the environment feels slow to move, you can build pockets of change—small areas where new practices grow and demonstrate their value.

Strengthening Innovation through Storytelling and Communication

While you have found a solution worth implementing, and are anticipating how your organisation and other actors might react to the change, you might want to look at your communication strategy for the entire process.

To sustain your efforts over time, it is necessary to communicate effectively with several groups: those whom you wish to change their mindset or behaviour, the citizens affected or included in the design or implementation of the solution, academy that might have research on the topic, media that might help in spreading awareness or social media where you can let others know about your innovation journey.

Instead of only communicating finished projects or outcomes, make communication part of the innovation process. Let others know:

- What problem you're exploring and why it matters.
- What ideas are being tested—and what you've learned so far.
- What changes might come, and how people can shape them.

This open approach encourages trust. It shows humility, invites feedback, and allows others to relate to the process. It will also help you to sustain energy, as you will find people that will share the burden and check-in with you, when times are tough.

Data shows what is happening. A story shows why it matters. Stories can help reframe difficult issues, highlight invisible perspectives, or connect emotionally with others. You can use storytelling to:

- Communicate the purpose behind a project.
- Show the journey, including challenges and learning moments.
- Help others see themselves as part of the solution.

Think of storytelling not just as a public relations tool, but as a method of shaping culture and mindset.

Communication in public innovation is not just about transmitting facts or managing reputation. It's about building the kind of relationships that enable change—relationships built on clarity, respect, and trust. But trust doesn't come from simply saying "trust me." It comes from how and when we choose to communicate, and with whom.

3. Knowing When to Be Transparent—and When to Hold Back

There is often pressure to "communicate everything," especially in public sector settings where accountability is important. But honest communication is not the same as full disclosure at all times. Sometimes, the most respectful and strategic move is to hold back—especially during phases of uncertainty, sensitive exploration, or when relationships are not yet strong enough to carry the weight of disagreement.

Example: If a team is still testing ideas that might fail, communicating too early can cause fear or resistance in the system. On the other hand, hiding key decisions for too long may erode trust once people find out.

This means you must actively manage the balance between openness and protection. Ask yourself:

- Will sharing this information now build trust—or raise barriers?
- Is this the right moment and audience for this message?
- Am I protecting the process, or avoiding discomfort?

In innovation, safe spaces for trial and error are essential. These spaces often require some shielding from public scrutiny—at least temporarily. It's not about secrecy, but about creating the psychological safety for honest reflection and experimentation.

3.1. Building Internal Trust Through Protected Spaces

One valuable format is the "closed" community of practice—such as innovation labs, interdepartmental working groups, or informal peer networks. These spaces should exclude external actors (consultants, citizens, media) so that public sector innovators can:

- Speak more openly about failures and stuck points.
- Test emerging ideas without fear of political backlash.
- Build shared language and understanding across silos.

Paradoxically, withholding public communication in these internal spaces can create more trust among participants. It tells them: "This space is just for us, and we are allowed to not have everything figured out."

Of course, these internal insights must eventually inform external communication and public accountability—but the timing and format matter.

□ Further Reading: If you would like to explore how to influence the way people think to change how society works, you can find a course on that here <https://community.ashoka.org/en/learn/how-influence-way-people-think-change-how-society-works>

What Comes Next: Creating Momentum After the Course

You've reached the final stage of this learning journey. By now, you've explored how societal problems emerge, how to map and reframe them, and how to experiment with responses inside public systems. You've analysed power structures, levers for change, and the mindset required to lead innovation. But learning about social innovation isn't enough—what truly matters is what you do next.

This chapter is about turning your insights into action. It invites you to take small, practical steps toward embedding what you've learned—starting right now.

Start with What You Control

Innovation often feels overwhelming because public systems are large, slow, and complex. That's why your first step should be simple and grounded in what you already influence.

Here are examples of actions you might take immediately:

- Schedule a debrief meeting to share what you've learned with a colleague or team.
- Choose one tool or exercise (like the impact logic model, 5R map, or stakeholder mapping) and apply it to a current project.
- Propose a reflection round or peer exchange inside your department.
- Review an existing project for conflicting goals or unintended impacts.

Tip: Revisit your own impact logic model. Can you draft “key results” you want to see within the next 3–6 months—both for your own practice and your team's development?

Set Up for future learning

Even the best plans can lose momentum without a structure. Create these for yourself:

Practice Group: Join or found a small discussion group for shared learning and support.

Mentors and Allies: Identify 1–2 people who can give honest feedback and remind you of your purpose.

Make Reflection Part of Your Routine: Whenever you engage with actors, whom you identified in your actors' map, reflect on what you learn from them.

Keep on learning: If you liked this course and the hands-on methods it provided, you might also like <https://community.ashoka.org/en/learn>

4. Innovation as a Circular Practice

Social innovation in public administration isn't a sprint or a side project—it's a new way of working. You won't "complete" this journey in one cycle. What you can do is commit to coming back to it, again and again. With each cycle, you'll see more clearly, act more boldly, and lead more effectively.

You already have the tools. Now, the innovation journey begins.

Social Innovation in Public Administration

Workbook

About this document

This workbook is an annex to the *Social Innovation in Public Administration Curriculum*. Its contents are collected from third parties as cited or created by Laura Kromminga. The workbook should not be used without the guidance from the curriculum.

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Module 1

1. Checklist: Organisational Readiness for Social Innovation

Use this exercise to assess the maturity and readiness of your organisation to support social innovation.

Step 1: For each area, briefly describe the current status and identify one step you could take to move forward.

- **Institutionalise Innovation Roles and Structures**
Are there clear roles or units responsible for innovation in your organisation? If not, could you create safe spaces for experimentation?
- **Deepen and Diversify Participation**
Is your societal engagement inclusive and structured beyond basic consultation? If not, how might you reach your beneficiary group or target group in a more meaningful way of participation?
- **Anchor Innovation in Policy and Legal Frameworks**
In the past, have there been innovations embedded successfully into laws, policies, or strategic plans? If no, what was missing organisationally?
- **Stabilise and Diversify Funding Models**
Is there institutional funding secured for innovation? Does that funding come from multiple sources? If not, how could you move away from short-term project logic and single funder dependency?
- **Foster Ecosystem-Based Approaches**
Do you actively connect with other actors—civil society, business, academia or others—to sustain your innovation work? If not, what is blocking you to do so and what do you need to remove that obstacle?
- **Strengthen Monitoring, Evaluation, and Storytelling**
Are you measuring both tangible and intangible results on innovation solutions currently implemented? Are your stories of change reaching key stakeholders? If not, which result 1 or 2 figures would be the most essential to have and whom would you need to reach with storytelling?

Step 2: Note down with area you are strong in, and which needs some work

Step 3: Elaborate on the weak areas: What would be 1-5 actions to strengthen them in the next 3 months? What or who would help you to make them happen? Who would be a good ally to keep you on track and check in with you on the progress?

0. Exercise: Finding your Goal

Step 1: To identify your goal, it is important to clarify what you want to tackle with your innovation. Firstly, we need differentiate between the two fundamental targets of social innovation: improving government or improving benefits to society.

Answer the following questions:

1. What changes through a successful innovation?
 - a. Society
 - a. Government itself
2. Can you name a group of people, who will enjoy the benefits of your innovation?
 - a. Citizens (i.e. elderly people, people with disabilities)
 - a. Government workers (i.e. the HR department, front office staff)
2. What exactly is success in your innovation?
 - a. Citizens have an improved life
 - a. Government staff have an improved work situation

Step 2: Could weather you have ticked a) or b) more often. If you had primarily a) – you are focusing on an external innovation. If you had primarily b) – you are focusing on an internal innovation. If you got all b) answers, you are focussing on a more “hidden” societal purpose, since your innovation primarily targets government itself, while of course this improves something for society too (i.e. less spending in government, through more efficiency).

If you got a mixed result, this might be because you aim at a citizen, by improving government. If that is the case, you can focus on the citizen during the course.

Step 3: Write a goal statement. Use your finding weather you are working on an internal or external innovation.

“I will improve the working / life situation of _____ (person) in society / government.”

If you got a very mixed result, you can use this sentence instead:

“I will improve the life situation of _____ citizens, by improving the work situation of _____ people in government.”

0. Exercise: Analysing your problem through Cynefin

To further analyse your targeted problem, we use a simple tree diagram to find out the type of the problem. This is important, because it informs us about the

appropriate solution space. When designing solutions, we will come back to your result from this exercise.

Step 1: Setting system boundaries.

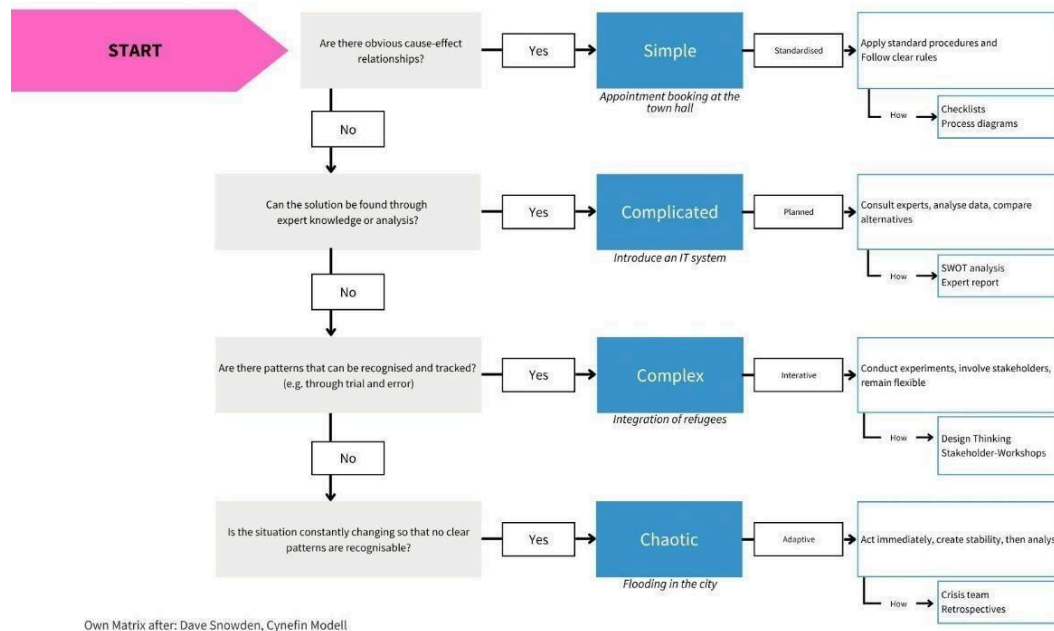
In order to know what the type of your problem is, you need to consider what is “outside” and what is “inside” the system you are looking at. For example, a leak in the roof of a school building is a simple type of problem – because there is a clear cause-effect and a new roof would be an appropriate solution. But looking at the wider system: the underfunding of that particular school (and the lack of maintenance of the roof in the first place) or the complex funding system of the regional school system is broadening your system boundaries – and therefore change what type of problem you are looking at.

Write down:

1. What is the problem, you are focusing on?
2. What is inside the system boundaries? Do you e.g. take into account where resources come from or how actors influence it?
3. What is outside your system boundaries? What is the system above and what are other systems influencing your system? E.g. the financial system of government highly influences school funding, but is outside your defined system boundaries when looking at renovations in one particular school.

Step 2: Note your problem type

Answer the following questions in the flow diagram:



0. Exercise: Building trust into your institution

To build trust, it is ideal to start with a small intervention to establish a connection between your department or institution and a specific stakeholder. Trust is not built in a single action, but through repeated interactions where others learn that they can rely on you over time.

Step 1: Choose a specific stakeholder

Depending on your answer in the previous exercise on your innovation focus: you can either choose an internal or external person or group.

Examples:

- External:
 - A local youth association that sees your department as slow and unresponsive
 - A citizen group frustrated with a lack of transparency in decision-making
- Internal:
 - A colleague from another government unit who avoids collaboration

Who is the stakeholder? _____

Step 2: Understand what trust means for them

Think about how this person or group defines trust. What might have hurt trust in the past? What might help rebuild it?

What would trust look like from their perspective? _____

Did something specific happen in the past, that deteriorated trust? _____

Step 3: Design a small intervention to build trust

Choose one small, testable action that fits within your current role. It should strengthen one or more trust-building factors:

- Visibility & familiarity ("I know them")
- Consistency & follow-through ("They do what they say")
- Responsiveness ("They listen when something new comes up")

What action will you take? _____

How will you know if it worked? What will you observe or measure? _____

Step 4: Compare this to your current interaction pattern

How is your proposed action different from what you or your department currently do?

What is the current interaction like? _____

What changes does your new action introduce? _____

Step 5: Prepare to test and ask for feedback

Who will you ask for feedback, and how? Write a short sentence you might use.

Feedback prompt: "We're trying to improve how we work with you. Can I ask how this experience felt to you?"

What feedback will you ask for? _____

Instead of asking directly, are there signs of trust, which you can observe? (for example: an increase in shared information) _____

0. Exercise on the social enterprise matrix

Social Enterprises can be a great ally to help you on your social innovation journey. They might have information on the innovation process, might have impact measurement reports or would be open to a collaboration or partnership.

Firstly, you need to be able to find social enterprises in your local context: no easy feat, because "Social Enterprise" is not a term with a universal definition. Your

language might also have other terms in use like “Empresa Social” or “Sozialunternehmen”, that might come with their own slightly different meaning. Secondly, many organisations would classify as a Social Enterprise without ever using the term themselves, therefore being much harder to find.

The Basis for this exercise is the Criteria Matrix, created for the Regional Government of Berlins Department of Economic Affairs.

Step 1: Identify Organisations, that cover the Basics

Search for organisations hit both target criteria on Societal Objective (criteria 2a) and Innovation (criteria 3a)

1. Clear on their Societal Objective: “The organization meets specific social or environmental needs or actively contributes to the public welfare.” by showing that
 - a. Problem areas are specifically named (social or ecological problem, affected stakeholders, interrelationships and causes of the problem)
 - a. The organisation pursues at least one SDG
 - a. The causes of the problem can be presented in detail and underpinned with data
 - a. The problem area has been examined in detail. Scientific studies on the problem area can be cited.
 - a. The future prospects are presented. Scientific sources are also cited for these future scenarios.
2. Clear on their Innovation: “The organization is innovative or offers an innovative product or service.” by showing progression on
 - a. The organization offers an innovation that is offered only occasionally or rarely by a few other local providers, i.e. the innovation may already be the norm in the national context.
 - a. The organization offers an innovation that is offered only occasionally or rarely by a few other national providers, i.e. the innovation may already be the norm in an international context.
 - a. The organization offers an innovation that is not offered by any other national provider.
 - a. The organization offers an innovation that is not offered by any other national provider.

- a. The innovation pursues the goal of structurally changing systems, especially those that have led to the cause of the social problem (systemic change)

Additionally, to these two criteria, a Social Enterprise needs to have earned income to differentiate towards a charitable organisation, that is purely funded through donations and grants. If you want to add this criterion you can use the following (criteria 1c)

- 0. Level of income versus expenses: "The company can cover part of its expenses through sales revenue."
 - a. Revenue accounts for at least 25% of all funding.
 - a. Revenue accounts for at least 51% of all funding.
 - a. Revenue accounts for at least 75% of all funding.
 - a. Revenue accounts for at least 100% of all funding.

If you want to add criteria, for example around the stability of the financial situation, how profits are used or if the economic activity is sustainable in itself – you can potentially add more criteria. You can see the full Criteria Matrix on the next page.

Module 2

0. Exercise: Self-Assessment on Why Social Innovation Isn't Practiced Yet

Before moving further, reflect on your own working environment. What are the barriers that prevent social innovation from being practiced in your day-to-day work?

Please use the following checklist to identify which challenges you personally face or observe in your team.

Mark the ones most relevant to you and keep them in mind when planning future collaboration or innovation processes.

Checklist – Barriers to Social Innovation in My Workplace

Barrier Type	Examples	Applie s
Legal/Regulatory	Rigid procurement laws; inability to pilot new approaches legally	[]
Social	Risk-aversion in the team; fear of failure	[]
Strategic	Lack of long-term political support; frequent leadership changes	[]

Interpersonal/Skills	Lack of collaboration culture; missing co-creation competencies	[]
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0. Exercise: Writing your problem statement

Objective:

Learn how to explore and shift your problem perspective by rewording, questioning, and expanding your understanding of a real-world challenge.

Step 1: Start with a Current Problem

Think of a problem from your current work in public administration—ideally, something you have direct experience with or are actively working on. Be sure to not use words like “is lacking” or “needs more”, because those indicate that you already have a solution in mind.

Write it down in one sentence:

Example 1: “Citizens are not using our job portal as expected.”

(Avoid framing it as a lack of a particular solution, e.g. “We need a better platform.”)

Example 2: “Youth in our city often are unemployed even one year after finishing High School.”

(Avoid framing it as a lack of a particular solution, e.g. “Youth are not receiving enough job training in their school.”)

Your problem sentence: _____

Step 2: Reframe it as a “How Might We” Question

Take your sentence and turn it into an open-ended, possibility-driven question.

Example:

Original 1: “Citizens are not using our job portal as expected.”

Reframed: “How might we help citizens find job-related support in ways that match their daily lives?”

Original 2: “Youth in our city often are unemployed even one year after finishing High School.”

Reframed: “How might we help youth to get to know the local job market in a more meaningful way?”

Your Turn:

Reframe your statement using a “How might we...” format:

Your reframed statement: _____

Step 3: Identify the Tension or Paradox

Most public challenges involve competing needs or values. Identify at least one tension in your problem area.

Think about:

- Who benefits from the current situation?
- Who might resist the change you are considering?
- What trade-offs are involved?

Example 1: “We want to reduce paper use in public offices, but older citizens rely on printed documents.”

Example 2: “The local business leaders have a very hierarchical approach to leadership, but the youth are less accepting of that than previous generations.”

Your Turn: What is the core tension in your problem?

- Who benefits from the current situation?

- Who might resist the change you are considering?

- What trade-offs are involved?

Step 4: Rephrase from Different Perspectives

Now try writing your problem from at least two other points of view:

- A frontline worker (e.g. social worker, clerk, teacher)
- A citizen affected by the issue (e.g. unemployed young person, migrant family)
- A partner institution (e.g. NGO, city council, service provider)

Example 1:

Frontline worker: “I don’t have time to explain every job portal feature to clients.”

Citizen: “I don’t understand how this system helps me, and I’m not sure it’s worth trying.”

Your Turn:

Perspective 1:

Perspective 2:

Perspective 3:

Step 5: Reflection – What Changed?

Did your understanding of the problem shift?

Are you still solving the same issue—or do you need to re-write your problem statement?

What possibilities opened up by reframing?

0. Exercise: Finding root causes by asking why

Sometimes, children are the best teachers. And how a 5-year-old might ask “why” to understand something, we will do the same here. This exercise prepares you to build a logical logic model, by making sure that root causes are not only *correlated* but *caused* by one another. By doing so you can uncover deeper motives, potential barriers, hidden assumptions and more.

You might find it easiest to fill in and then verify with another person, who can challenge you in your beliefs.

Step 1: Write down your current problem statement:

Step 2: Why does this problem exist? Note at least 3 different “strands” of the problem roots. For example: Youth do not receive job training in their school, Youth might have unemployed parents and therefore less exposure, Youth might have working parents with no time to help during job applications

Root A:

Root B:

Root C:

Step 3: Now let us proceed to finding the roots of these roots. Start with your root 1 and go further by asking “Why is that” up to five times:

Root A1: _____

Root A2: _____

Root A3: _____

Root A4: _____

Root A5: _____

Step 4: Go through your analysis the opposite direction – if you read it from root A5 “upwards” to root A1, is there a correlation and a causation (Meaning, is A5 clearly caused by A4 or are they just correlating?). Correct if necessary.

Step 5: Continue the same with Root B and Root C, creating strands of B1-B5 and C1-C5 root causes.

Step 6: You might notice that this exercise can be done “ad infinitum” and there are more roots to all of the roots. Then you are on the right track! Actually, you could start this exercise from many more “problem statements” and go downwards into the roots.

If you want to adjust which “problem statement” to focus on, you can now adjust by taking a statement from one of your root causes instead of your original.

Your new problem statement: _____

0. Exercise: Filling in the problem tree

You can now take your root cause analysis and add the consequences of your problem. The consequences are those things that are directly caused by your problem. For example, the problem “Youth in our city often are unemployed even one year after finishing High School.” causes “Youth mental health is poor in our city” or “Petty crime among people aged 20-25 is higher than in other cities”.

Step 1: Think of at least 3 different and distinct consequences of your problem.

Consequence A: _____

Consequence B: _____

Consequence C: _____

Step 2: Start with Consequence A and elaborate what is happening, to whom and what further consequences does that produce?

Consequence A1: _____

Consequence A2: _____

Consequence A3: _____

Consequence A4: _____

Consequence A5: _____

Step 3: Continue with the Consequences B and C, adding further consequences to them as you go.

Step 4: You can now create a visual from the root causes and the consequences. To do so, you write your problem statement into the middle, representing the “trunk of a tree”, then add the root causes as the roots and the consequences into the branches of the tree.

Step 5: You can now check your tree through the following check list:

1. Problem Statement = Trunk of the tree
 - a. Is your Problem Statement formulated as a negative statement?
 - a. Did you avoid “need” / “should” or similar, to not embed a solution?
 - a. Have you captured the geographical scope of the Problem Statement?
 - a. Does your Problem Statement include statistical data supporting your statement?
 - a. From all possible problem formulations, do you feel the one you selected for the trunk is the one that moves you the most?
 - a. Can your problem statement be easily reversed into a Big Vision by using a positive formulation and does it sound right to you then as well?
2. Consequences = Crown of the tree
 - a. Have you considered different types of consequences (social, political, economic etc.)?
 - a. Would they be convincing for key stakeholders who are able to influence the Problem?
 - a. Do your statements include statistical data?
2. Root Causes = Roots of the tree
 - a. Do your root causes capture systems (e.g. the school system)?
 - a. Have you considered any non-obvious systems as well?
 - a. Do your root causes include geographical scope?
 - a. Are your root causes supported by statistical data?
 - a. Have you selected and marked one root cause system that you will focus on?
 - a. Does the choice of root cause resonate with you?

□ Further reading: if you would like a more detailed look on how to build a problem tree: try the Ashoka course on Systems Change

<https://ashokacommunity.thinkific.com/courses/SystemsChange>

0. Exercise: Creating a holistic reform for individual stakeholders

The following symptoms help you to identify what the system is missing. It is easier to look at individual people, rather than considering whole organisations. It also helps to imagine one specific situation and think of behaviour you have observed before during that particular incidence.

Step 1: Select a person and situation

Take your systems map and select a person, who is critical for the system. For example: someone with a lot of decision-making power or someone making financial decisions. Then, choose a situation in which the person is repeatedly involved in.

The Person and situation to focus on:

Step 2: Identifying Symptoms

Now write down which of the following symptoms you observe:

- Confusion
- Fear
- False Starts
- Frustration
- Small Steps

Step 3: Note patterns

Repeat this exercise and see if you can identify a pattern. For example, a number of failed starts. Make a separate note of that:

Step 4: Collect counter-measures

When actors are missing an essential element to create a desired change, they might be stuck in repeatedly creating the symptoms we observe.

Here is a list of elements needed to create the desired change:

Observed Symptom	Needed Element
Confusion	Goals
Fear	Skills
False Start	Action Plan
Frustration	Resources
Small Steps	Incentives

Here is another way of showing the elements needed for desired change:

	Skills	Action Plan	Resources	Incentives	= Confusion
Goal		Action Plan	Resources	Incentives	= Fear
Goal	Skills		Resources	Incentives	= False Start
Goal	Skills	Action Plan		Incentives	= Frustration
Goal	Skills	Action Plan	Resources		= Small Steps
Goal	Skills	Action Plan	Resources	Incentives	= Desired Change
What is missing in your context:					

Step 5: Reflection

What is the dominant element missing, or are there multiple elements with different actors? Note here what elements could bring about the desired change:

0. Exercise: Finding existing solutions

Usually other people have tried to fix your problem before you. It is very helpful to find out why the problem keeps persisting, before you build your own solution in the following modules. This way, you can learn from history and avoid repeating other people's mistakes, as well as building something that actually already exists and would be redundant.

Step 1: Search for solutions, that are already being tried. Create a map of the current status-quo solution landscape. You can start by looking into the following systems and add stakeholders and their solutions from them: economy, government, finance, aid organisations, academy, media, local community groups.

Step 2: Categorize by the type of solutions these stakeholders use. You can add them to the following table.

As type use:

- Offering a service or product
- Funding a service or product creation
- Convening different stakeholders
- Educating or providing access to knowledge
- Sharing practices or experiences

System	Actor	Solution	Type

0. Exercise: Finding partners for Collaboration

It might be a good idea to look for collaborators and allies for your Social Innovation journey. On the one hand, this will help you to stay on track and keep on going. On the other hand, large societal problems are not solvable by one organisation or one person alone. Therefore, it is crucial to start looking for partners.

Step 1: Collect first ideas for collaborators, allies or partners. You can use your map of existing solutions as a starting point. Identify who already is or could be a potential collaborator and mark them on your map.

Step 2: Expand on your map and look beyond – Who else (organisation or individual person) could be another collaborator?

Step 3: Take your list and ask yourself: What do they each want? How would you engage them in collaboration or co-creation of a potential solution? What would a successful partnership look like?

0. Exercise: Adopting a Systems-Led Role

Objective:

In order to stay open for potential solutions, we are now taking a look at the different roles you could potentially adopt in your system. Note here, that we are not creating

a specific solution yet! We are still identifying the problem and trying to get to the core of why it keeps persisting.

Step 1: Context of your problem

Take your problem statement from the earlier exercise. You can also choose to change your problem statement. In 1–2 sentences, describe the specific context or problem.

The context of your problem:

Step 2: Role Overview

Read these brief role summaries (note that we used these in the earlier exercise to map your solution landscape):

Role	Function
Convener	Brings diverse stakeholders together around a shared purpose.
Educator	Shares knowledge and builds capacity—teaching across the system.
Gap Filler	Identifies and fills a missing piece or niche in existing systems. For example, by providing a product or service.
Sharer	Opens access to expertise, tools, or networks to empower others.
Systems-Led Leader	Makes strategic interventions aimed at improving the system for others.

Step 3: Role Selection & Rationale

Choose one role (or combine 2–3 roles if needed) and describe how this role could look like for your problem statement.

Why does this role suit your context?

What advantage does it bring to your problem and the involved system?

Step 4: Action Planning

Fill in the table for all possible role(s) by adding an example activity, the desired effect on the system and the timeline and partners needed.

Here is an example on our problem around Youth Unemployment:

Role	Example Activity	Desired Effect on System	Timeline & Partner(s)
Convener	E.g. host stakeholder roundtable on youth hiring	Surface shared challenges; build trust	1 y/youth NGOs, business reps
Educator	E.g. workshop for school staff on job market trends	Better job-readiness curriculum	2 mo / schools, experts
Gap Filler	E.g. build peer-mentorship pilot program	Supplement lacking career pathways	3 mo / volunteers, youth orgs
Sharer	E.g. publish toolkit on job-start guidelines	Broader use of best practices	6 mo / digital platform
Systems-Led Leader	E.g. advocate streamlined inter-agency funding	Structural change enabling collaboration	9 mo / agency leadership

Step 5: Reflection on your role and the system

You have now experimented with taking different roles to address the system. You have also look at examples for activities, potential collaborators and timelines. In order to analyse the problem landscape, please answer the following reflection questions.

- Inner Work: What personal values, experiences, or biases might have influenced which role you liked best?
- Relational Work: Whom did you enjoy having as a partner and who was difficult to envision working with?
- Structural Work: Which role is underrepresented in the current solution landscape? Could this under-representation be a part of the answer, why this problem keeps persisting? If yes, what do you think why this role is underrepresented?

Module 3

1. Exercise: Connecting political programs to your problem

We are now narrowing down the larger problem landscape into a problem statement, which is relevant for your role and your section of the public administration, which you are a part of. In order to do so, we will take a look at the existing political goals, which you / your department is tasked with.

Step 1: Finding the political context

Take any political program, which is relevant for your geographic location: for national take the federal level, for regional take an appropriate regional context (for example the state) and for local take the municipality level. Extract from it, which goals and programs you find there, which are relevant for your section of public administration and/or your problem.

Copy them here:

Step 2: Connect it to your problem

Is it possible to extract from these statements, how they are relevant to your problem? For example, do they specifically name your target group? Or do they name a solution, without naming the problem first (e.g. "New funding for job coaching in schools").

Note down how these political statements connect to your problem:

0. Exercise: Questions to Identify if an Actor Is Playing Finite or Infinite

To find out more about the actors, which we already identified, we are now looking at their Game strategies. Analysing them will tell you, which actors might follow a different logic and therefore should be approached differently than others.

Step 1: Select actors, which you previously marked as potential partners

Potential Partner 1: _____

Potential Partner 2: _____

Potential Partner 3: _____

Potential Partner 4: _____

Step 2: For each of them, answer the following questions:

- How long is this actor (person, not organisation) planning to stay engaged in this issue?
- Are they focused on short-term wins or long-term relationships?
- How many instances of collaboration have you observed? Do they outnumber the instances in which the actor prioritised their own benefit?

Step 3: Note if the actor takes a finite or infinite mindset. When they adopt an infinite mindset, also note whom they typically collaborate with (and whom they do not).

Step 4: Note the game strategy of the actor.

Choose one of the following “game types” that best describes the dynamic between actors:

- Stag Hunt: Actors want to collaborate but only if others do too (coordination problem)
- Prisoner's Dilemma: Each actor has an incentive to act in self-interest even if collaboration would benefit everyone (trust issue)
- Zero-Sum Game: One actor's gain is seen as another's loss (competition for budget/credit)

Step 4: Reflect on the exercise. Does this change which potential partner you should choose? Note that the actors game preference is more often dictated by their role in the system – their game preference is not likely to change, if the rules to the game stay the same.

0. Exercise: Stakeholder map to Stakeholder strategy (using game theory)

Prepare strategies to increase alignment and reduce resistance, using a game designers' perspective. In the previous exercise we assumed that you cannot change the rule of the game and therefore the actor's strategy will stay the same.

Now think like a game designer. What can you do to change the “rules” of interaction so that collaboration becomes more likely?

Strategies could include:

- Joint pilot project with low stakes
- Shared communication plan
- Political cover or legal assurance
- Transparent benefits or credit-sharing

Step 1: Take a game designers perspective

Your proposed interventions to change the rules to the game: _____

Step 2: Planning interactions with potential partners

How can this insight change the way you approach them? _____

Step 3: How does this exercise change your problem statement definition?

Old problem statement: _____

New problem statement: _____

(Note: The game designers' perspective is very close to designing a solution already. We will come back to that in the later modules.)

0. Exercise: Surfacing assumptions in existing solutions

This exercise helps you uncover hidden assumptions behind a strategy, intervention, or policy. By flipping those assumptions, you may expose blind spots and discover new perspectives. You can use the exercise from before, where we collected connections between political programs and your problem.

Step 1: Name a Current Strategy or Intervention

Select one current program, policy, or solution you're involved in or observing. Note that this should be an actionable solution. Example: A job readiness training program for unemployed youth.

Your example: _____

Step 2: Discover hidden assumptions

Ask yourself: what would have to be true for this strategy to work as intended? Write 2–3 assumptions that must hold for this strategy to be effective. Example for assumptions: a) Young people lack skills b) They will attend the course c) The training will lead to employment.

Your assumptions:

- a. _____
- a. _____
- a. _____

Step 3: Flip the Assumptions

Now, write the reverse of each assumption. What if the opposite were true?

For our Example: a) Young people already have skills. b) They can't or won't attend the course c) The training has little impact on hiring.

Your reverse assumptions:

- a. _____
- a. _____
- a. _____

Step 4: Reflect on what the reversals reveal

- Which of the statements sounds truer in its reversed state?
- What would this mean for the effectiveness of the solution?
- Is there data or stories that support the reverse assumption?

Your reflections:

Optional Step 5: Reflect with a colleague or front-line worker

Involving other people and their experience can be useful here. Looking for a different perspective (a colleague, stakeholder, or frontline worker) can help to gain further insight. Ask them both questions from Step 1 and Step 2: “What do you think would have to be true for this solution to work? What if the opposite was true?”

0. Exercise: Identifying solutions that are stuck

Even when many involved people know that an existing solution is built on faulty assumptions, and does therefore (or for a different reason) not produce the desired results, the system might be stuck on executing the same solution over and over. Therefore, we want to identify the structural, emotional and political reasons behind the resistance to change.

Step 1. Name a Solution that is stuck

Ask yourself: What program, project, or policy in my work context does not achieve a desired outcome? This might be because it no longer delivers on an intended outcome (the solution did not adapt over time to outside changes) or because the solution never had a good solution-problem fit in the first place (the solution-problem fit was low from the beginning).

Your Answer:

Step 2. Signs of Inertia

Now let's find out why the system might still keep on reproducing this solution, even though it does not fit the problem well (today).

Tick all that apply:

- The program has not changed in years
- There are regular complaints or low usage
- There is little or no data collected – we have only anecdotal evidence
- Key staff privately admit it's ineffective
- Attempts to improve it were shut down or ignored
- No clear process exists to end or replace it

Your observation:

0. Checklist: “Is this a Dead Horse?”

We will call those solutions, which do not (or no longer) deliver results “dead horses”. A native American saying, attributed to the Dakota, states that “When you discover that you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount.”

To make it easier to analyse any solution to find out whether or not it is a Dead Horse, you can check the list below. If more than six of the points below apply, then it is a true Dead Horse. With 4-6 points, a serious re-design of the solution is advisable.

Note: We call a solution a “project” here, but this can be applied to any solution, e.g. a funding program, long term program or any other intervention.

1. It is no longer possible to achieve the objectives

- ☐ The original objectives are no longer relevant or achievable.
- ☐ The framework conditions have changed so much that the project has lost its purpose.
- ☐ There is no longer a clear definition of what would be considered a success.

2. No political or organisational support

- ☐ The project no longer has the backing of decision-makers or relevant bodies.
- ☐ Financial or human resources have been reduced or cancelled.
- ☐ There are no ‘owners’ or stakeholders who feel responsible.

3. No progress despite repeated attempts

- ☐ Important milestones are repeatedly postponed or not achieved.
- ☐ Although corrective measures have been taken, there is no recognisable progress.
- ☐ Recurring problems or blockages cannot be solved.

4. Lack of acceptance or resistance

- ☐ The affected target groups (e.g. citizens, administrative units) reject the project or show no interest.
- ☐ There is strong internal resistance to the project (e.g. from other departments or employees).
- ☐ The project creates more problems than it solves.

5. Alternative solutions are better or have already been implemented

- ☐ There are other approaches or technologies that are more effective.
- ☐ Similar goals have already been achieved by other measures.
- ☐ There are new external solutions with far better results.

6. Waste of resources and opportunity costs

- ☐ The project ties up a disproportionate amount of resources.
- ☐ Important employees are trapped in this project and cannot devote themselves to more productive tasks.
- ☐ The cost-benefit ratio is no longer justifiable.

0. Exercise: Identify Dead Horse Strategies

Now let us look deeper into the strategies, which your organisation or wider system adopts, to keep going with solutions that do not deliver results. i.e. are Dead Horses.

Note here: to be a true dead horse, a solution needs to be beyond repair. A solution, which can still be fixed to deliver good results later on, does not count as a dead horse. If you are unsure, consider the checklist above.

Step 1: Identify Current strategies

Take a look at the strategies below and note down which of them is used in your organisation or system with regard to your problem statement.



Step 2: Identify if Communication hinders dismounting a dead horse

Additionally, to the strategies above, it might be that communication is an essential factor, why it is difficult to dismount the dead horse. For example:

- “It would look bad to our partners to cancel it.”
- “We already informed the public—it’s too late to stop now.”
- “We’ll rebrand it.”

Note which reply might be used in your organisation: _____

0. Exercise: Getting rid of a dead horse

Since we now know which dead horse we are dealing with (or which dead horses), we can identify way to finally dismount the horse. Note that the organisation has already lived with the dead horse for a while and might (strongly) resist this change.

Material: The dead horse and Strategies to avoid dismounting it, taken from exercises above

Step 1: Identifying actors

Answer the following question: Who is currently invested in keeping this dead horse alive, and why?

List actors or departments and their perceived risks, losses, or identities tied to the status quo. Consider:

- Fear
- sunk costs
- pride
- job security
- lack of alternatives

Your answer:

Step 2: Finding an alternative

Answer the following question: What could be offered to these actors as a meaningful alternative or "soft landing"?

Think in terms of:

- new roles
- new training
- recognition
- continuity of purpose

- symbolic value

Your answer:

Step 3: Piloting and communicating the alternative

1. Can you safely test or pilot a replacement without disrupting the system entirely?
If yes, outline what would need to be true to make this small test acceptable to the stakeholders.
2. How will you communicate this transition to the stakeholders to reduce fear and create buy-in?
Describe a messaging strategy that aligns with values, minimizes blame, and encourages shared learning or ownership.

Testing the solution:

Communication strategy:

0. Exercise: Identify Sunk Costs

A very strong factor to keep going with a Dead Horse are Sunk Costs.

Definition: Sunk Costs is a cost, that has already been incurred and cannot be recovered. For Example, an outside contractor working on the project has already been paid, and therefore this money cannot be recovered.

They are such a strong motivator to keep going with a Dead Horse solution, because people generally over-think sunk cost effects. After a threshold is past, it feels too hard to admit that the money is gone. But spending more on this solution does not make more sense, just because money was spent. Therefore, we want stakeholders to realise that they stepped into the Sunk Cost Fallacy.

Step 1: Identifying Sunk Costs involved

Ask yourself: What investments in this Dead Horse are making it difficult to stop or rethink?

- Money already spent: _____
- People or teams involved: _____
- Political promises or visibility: _____
- Time already invested: _____

Step 2: Helping people see the Fallacy

How could you speak to the involved stakeholders to make them see the irrational choice to keep going, even though it is known to be a Dead Horse? Choose one of the two options below (or come up with your own) and write a sentence to approach stakeholders for a decision.

Option 1. Future-Focused Narrative ("Turning the Page")

Craft a message that shifts attention from the past to the future, highlighting opportunity costs and what could be gained by reallocating resources: "We've learned a lot from this project—lessons that position us well to move forward smarter. Continuing would mean missing out on newer, more effective options. Let's build on what we've learned and make the next phase even stronger."

How this helps: Reduces perceived failure, re-frames change as growth, and leverages learning as a legitimate return on investment.

Option 2. Framing It as Responsible Stewardship

Position the decision to stop as an act of fiscal responsibility and ethical leadership: "Every euro we continue to invest here is a euro we can't spend on solutions that better serve our goals. It's not about giving up—it's about making wise, timely decisions in the public's best interest."

How this helps: Appeals to duty and public accountability, reducing emotional attachment by aligning action with shared values. Note that this strategy is especially useful, when an alternative solution with better results already exists.

Write a short sentence explaining, which you could use:

0. Exercise: Reducing bias by increasing Factfulness

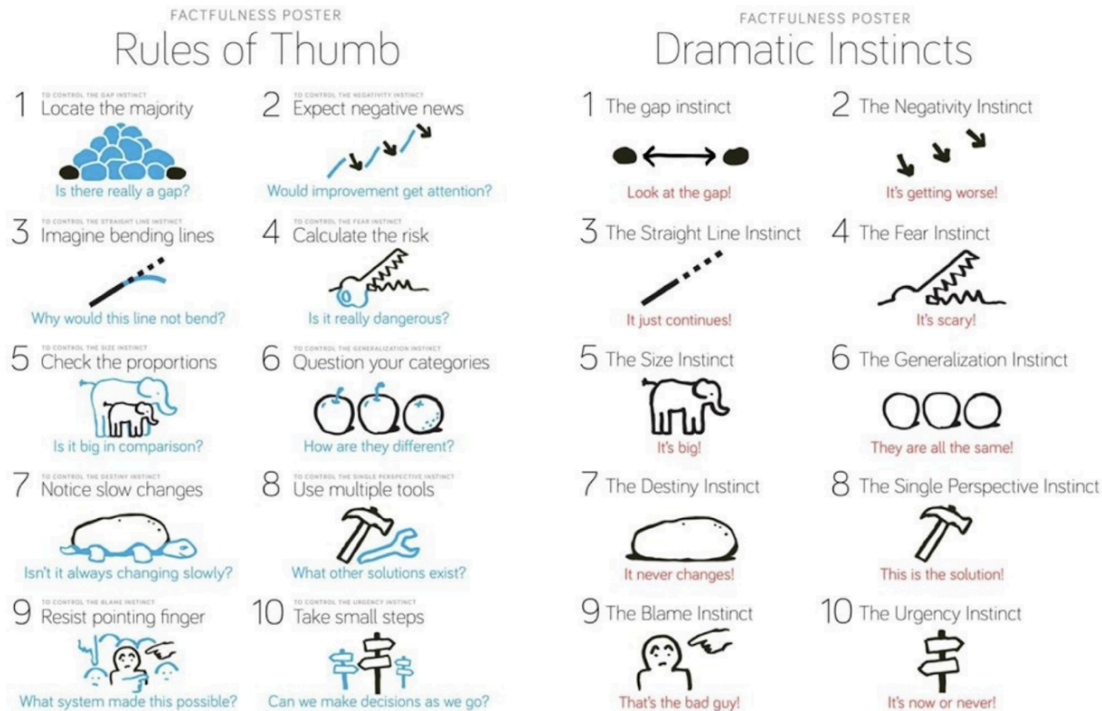
By identifying biases in the solutions landscape, you can find further ways of creating benefit. By helping actors overcome their biases, they can find new ways of acting and potentially create more societal value.

Materials needed: The solution landscape from the above exercise

Step 1: Identify Dramatic Instincts

Firstly, you need to identify the Dramatic Instincts, which the stakeholders in the landscape exhibit. Note that you might not have all the information necessary and this is a very person-centric exercise. If you do not know the people involved, you need to consult colleagues who do have that insight.

Here is a list of the 10 Dramatic Instincts:



Write down, which instincts you have heard from stakeholders from the solution landscape in previous conversations with them.

Actor (Organisation and Person): _____ and the instinct _____

Step 2: Map out Counter Activities

Since we now know what we need to counter, here is a list of “Rules of Thumb” to act against each of the instincts:



Add the points from above into the following table and add Rules of Thumb for each.

Stakeholder (Name the organisation and the person)	Dramatic Instinct, which they used	In what moment did this happen?	Countering with a Rule of Thumb. What could you use and in what situation?

Module 4

1. Exercise: Writing your Vision Statement

Materials needed: Your final problem statement

Step 1: To build a fitting innovation, it helps to create a Vision Statement. This can be used to stay focused, communicate more effectively about your goal and onboard allies to your cause. Use your problem statement as a starting point and flip it into a vision statement, by turning it on its head. Note that you should not imply what a solution could be.

For example, for our problem “Youth in our city often are unemployed even one year after finishing High School.” we could flip it into the following Vision: “Our local government helps Youth to navigate the transition between education and work.”

Use the following sentence as a guide

Vision: A world / city / country in which _____ (person) ____ (verb) _____ (goal)

Your Vision: _____

0. Exercise: Building on the existing innovation culture

Materials needed: The Checklist on Organisational Readiness for Social Innovation

The goal of this exercise is to map out ways to innovate in your work context. If the Checklist revealed a low readiness to innovate, you might want to start smaller. If you found an innovation culture already, you can build upon that. In the following steps, try to not limit your imagination and come up with as many innovations as you can.

Step 1: Ideas on innovating “how” things are done

Collect all the ways, that you can change “how” things are done. Note everything, that comes to your mind, no matter if you actually plan on doing this.

For example: If your department is processing funding for Youth Employment programs, you could note down ways to change and improve “how” you are doing this.

Step 2: Ideas on innovating “what” things are done

Now you can collect ideas on completely new tasks, project and solutions. Here we want to come up with completely new things, that have not been tried in your department. However, you can note solutions, which are tried in your local government or other parts of the country.

Step 3: Add ideas, that are completely new

In this last step, add solution ideas that are completely out of context: Either because they are new in your country or new to public administration. Sometimes, the best innovations come from a different context. For example, if you can adopt a solution from a social enterprise into your public administration, you might be up for a more drastic change.

Step 4: Note the “innovation” progress

Reflect how the Steps 1 to 3 made you come up with continuously more difficult, grand, or radical innovations. We are intentionally not trying to limit our imagination

here. If this is uncomfortable or sounds too risky, try doing this exercise with a trusted advisor, colleague or friend. Let them know the rules of this exercise: no limits to imagination.

0. Exercise: Analysing your system using the 5R framework

The following exercise is part of the Ashoka Course “Working with government as a pathway to Systems Change

This exercise enables you to map your system using the 5R framework and make explicit the Roles, Relationships, Results, Resources and Rules that shape the societal challenge your focussing on.

Materials needed: Your current problem statement and systems boundaries

Step 1: Set the frame

Write your working problem statement and define the system boundary (who/what is inside your scope for now). Note the geographic, institutional, and time boundaries so your 5R mapping stays focused.

Step 2: ROLES

List all actors that have a role in the system (institutions, units, teams, frontline workers, intermediaries, vendors, community groups, beneficiaries). Add what each actor is expected to do today and what role you believe each should play to make your solution work. Mark unclear or contested roles with a “?” for later discussion.

Step 3: RELATIONSHIPS

Map who talks to whom, who coordinates with whom, and where collaboration, trust, or information flow is strong or weak. Draw simple arrows or write short notes (e.g., “monthly coordination”, “data doesn’t flow”, “informal champion connects X↔Y”). Circle relationships that will be critical for your solution and star those that need repair or strengthening.

Step 4: RESULTS

Write down the visible outputs the system currently produces (services delivered, cases processed, outreach activities) and the outcomes you actually observe for people (changes in behaviour, access, satisfaction). Note any gaps between what gets produced and what people actually need.

Step 5: RESOURCES

Note down and resources, like: inventory, money, people, time, data, infrastructure and decision rights. Note constraints (earmarked budgets, hiring freezes, missing skills, legacy IT) and underused assets (underspent lines, unused space, data you already collect, staff motivation). Mark which resources you control versus those you must influence.

Step 6: RULES

Capture formal rules (laws, regulations, procurement rules, SOPs) and informal rules (habits, norms, “how things are done”). Flag which rules are enabling, which are constraining, and which might be reinterpreted, waived, piloted around, or amended.

Step 7: Spot tensions and leverage points

Review your five lists together. Circle contradictions (e.g., a role expects collaboration, but relationships show no channel). Highlight 3–5 leverage points where a targeted change in one “R” could unlock movement in the others (e.g., a memorandum of understanding to formalize a key relationship; a small training budget to unlock a missing capability).

Step 8: Prioritize actions

Choose one quick win (improve one relationship or clarify one role), one resource move (reallocate or unlock an underused asset), and one rules move (reinterpret, request an exemption, or draft a change note). Write a concrete next step and an owner for each.

Optional Step 9: Sanity check with stakeholders

Share your draft 5R map with two colleagues from different parts of the system. Ask them to add missing actors, correct relationships, and validate where a change is feasible in the next quarter.

Step 10: Link back to your impact logic model

Translate your top leverage points into changes you expect in Results and Outcomes; note which Roles and Relationships must shift and what Resources and Rules will support that shift. This closes the loop from system mapping to action.

0. Exercise: Refining your 5R map to include types of innovators

To deepen your understanding of structural gaps, we will use your existing systems map and refine it by looking at different innovation roles, which you could take to enable better collaboration across your system.

Materials needed: Your 5R systems map

Step 1: Look at your 5R map. Choose two elements (e.g. Roles + Relationships, Rules + Results) and ask: Where do these elements contradict or fail to reinforce each other?

Use the prompts below to reflect:

- Roles vs. Resources: Are people assigned certain roles, but lack the resources to fulfil them?
- Rules vs. Relationships: Do formal rules require collaboration, but there's little trust in the relationships?
- Results vs. Relationships: Are the results measured based on individual performance, even though the work requires collaboration?
- Roles vs. rules: Do key stakeholders have overlapping roles, causing duplication or turf battles?

Example: Schools are supposed to partner with employers (role) to create effective job trainings, but there's no funding or time allocated for the coordination (resource gap). As a result, the intended collaboration rarely happens.

Write down 2–3 key friction points you observe in your systems map:

Friction Point A: _____

Friction Point B: _____

Friction Point C: _____

Step 2: Choosing a Role to innovate

Choose one of your friction points. If the system had one of these new roles, what would change?

Role	Function
Convener	Brings diverse stakeholders together around a shared purpose.
Educator	Shares knowledge and builds capacity—teaching across the system.

Gap Filler	Identifies and fills a missing piece or niche in existing systems. For example, by providing a product or service.
Sharer	Opens access to expertise, tools, or networks to empower others.

Your Reflection:

Step 3: Design a new role Hypothesis

Now imagine a simple, strategic new action you could do. This isn't a formal project yet — it's a hypothesis to test. Fill in the blanks:

"If I create a space for _____ and _____ to work together on _____, then we might begin to increase/reduce _____ and move toward _____."

Your Sentence:

Example:

"If I create a space for schools and job centres to work together on youth follow-up data, then we might begin to increase satisfaction of youth with job training programs and move toward more responsive services."

Step 4: Define your Leverage point

Finally, define your role, considering your job position and your department. Based on your position in the system, which role could you take on?

Convener	Can you convene people?	[]
Educator	Can you share information others don't have?	[]
Gap Filler	Can you provide a new product or service?	[]
Sharer	Can you empower others?	[]

Describe how you'll act in that (new) role:

Module 5

1. Exercise: Collecting ideas to align the System using the 5R Model

When designing your solution start from where the system is misaligned.

Step 1: Identifying misalignment in the system

Ask yourself the following questions. You might want to consult colleagues or front-line workers too, especially if you do not have direct exposure to all the stakeholders involved in your system.

- Does your system have a shared, measurable goal?
- Are the right roles empowered to act (from your 5R analysis)?
- Are incentives reinforcing or blocking desired change?
- Are current rules or resources creating resistance?
- Which "dead horses" are still being ridden, draining focus and funding?

Your reflection about your system:

Step 2: Collecting ideas to combat system misalignment

Your innovation can focus on shifting one or more of these levers. Make sure to collect a lot of ideas. We are not going into detail here, but collecting a wide variety of potential solutions.

For example:

- Creating a platform for coordination when relationships are fragmented.
- Piloting a capacity-building initiative when local actors lack skills or staff.
- Proposing a procurement reform when money is flowing to ineffective actors.
- Recasting a "role" (e.g. teacher, caseworker) to become a co-creator of change.

Your reflection what solutions could align your system better:

Step 3: Getting actors "unstuck" from their typical ways

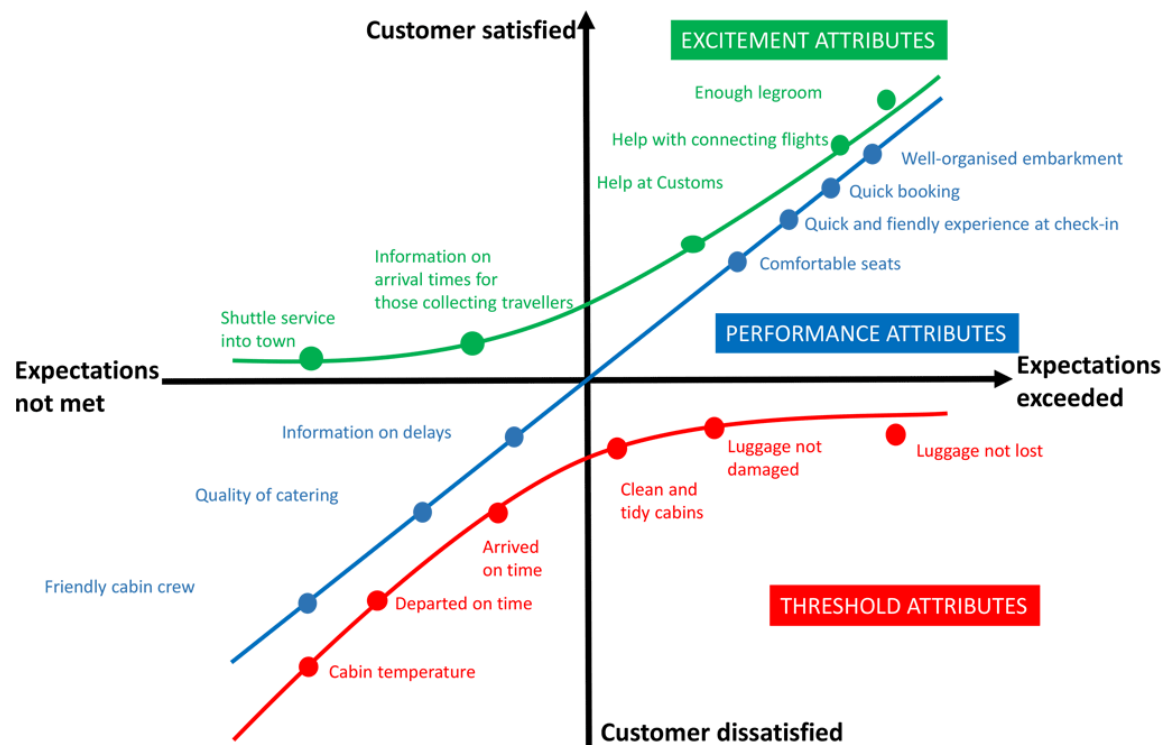
Now we can take a look at which actors are misaligned and what they might need to get un-stuck. Consider, that this actor might not themselves believe, that their behaviour is misaligned, but rather that it is necessary or rational or aligned with their goal(s).

Fill in the following table with actors, and ways to move them towards alignment by putting yourself in their shoes first:

Name the Actor	Put yourself into their position: How is their behaviour rational or logical?	How could they be motivated to change their behaviour?

0. Exercise: Collecting requirements of the target group using the Kano Model

In order to create a fitting solution, we need to understand the needs and requirements of the target group. You can use the following model in any context, to better understand requirements, but here we will use it to understand the societal needs.



Step 1: Analysing if existing solutions meet expectations

Firstly, take a look at all the solutions that are already implemented. For example, youth in your city might already get job training during school, have access to a mentor at a job centre, can sign up for classes to write a resume or attend a job fair. In our example the job training during schools could have:

- Threshold Attributes: The trainer is on time and hands out reading material

- Performance Attributes: The location is the local coworking space
- Excitement Attributes: One of the founders gives a keynote and offers a training position at his start-up

Take one existing solution from your solutions landscape and note down what attributes meet or exceed your target groups expectations.

Step 2: Analysing if existing solutions satisfy or dissatisfy your target group

Take the same solution and analyse what attributes leave your target group dissatisfied or satisfied.

If you find that you have limited information, it might be valuable to consult a front-line worker.

0. Exercise: Creating new solutions with the Fast Idea Generator

Materials needed: Stakeholder map to Stakeholder strategy from Exercise 16

To get your creative side activated, the following exercise can help you to imagine very diverse new ideas. This exercise can also be done as a group. By doing this with a team, you can build upon each other's ideas and remind each other to be creative.

Step 1: Coming up with new ideas

The following canvas has 9 different idea types. Fill it in for your problem statement.

I want to generate new ideas
by thinking differently

FAST IDEA GENERATOR

THE APPROACH		THE NORMAL RULE	BENDING, BREAKING & STRETCHING THE RULE
	Inversion	Turn common practice upside down	Doctors treat patients
	Integration	Integrate the offer with other offers	People access a range of services in different locations
	Extension	Extend the offer	Schools provide learning opportunities to children and young people during the day
	Differentiation	Segment the offer	There is a 'one size fits all' approach
	Addition	Add a new element	Supermarkets deliver groceries
	Subtraction	Take something away	Prisons are critical to an effective criminal justice system
	Translation	Translate a practice associated with another field	Hospitals and airports are different kinds of operations
	Grafting	Graft on an element of practice from another field	Teaching and coaching are separate practices
	Exaggeration	Push something to its most extreme expression	Schools support children and young people to learn, but only within designated times and in a designated space

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Step 2: Use game theory to further detail your new solutions

How exactly would those new solutions change stakeholders game preferences? Is there anyone, who would change playing from a finite to an infinite game?

0. Exercise: Considering Goals from outside sources

In finding a “good” social innovation, it is necessary to formulate a goal that is aspiring and concrete enough to be operationalised into actionable steps. Since this is no easy task, it can help to use goals from other sources than your own organisation.

Note: It might be that your government branch or your government in general already works with these goal systems. In this case, rather than imagining which goals could be relevant, you can write down the ones that are already agreed on.

Step 1: Select the goal system

There are multiple goal systems, which could be relevant. Firstly, consider which one could be useful for your circumstance.

Mark which goal system you would like to use:

- Sustainable Development Goals (UN)
- Well-being Framework (OECD)
- Donut Economy (Kate Raworth)

Step 2: Connecting to your context

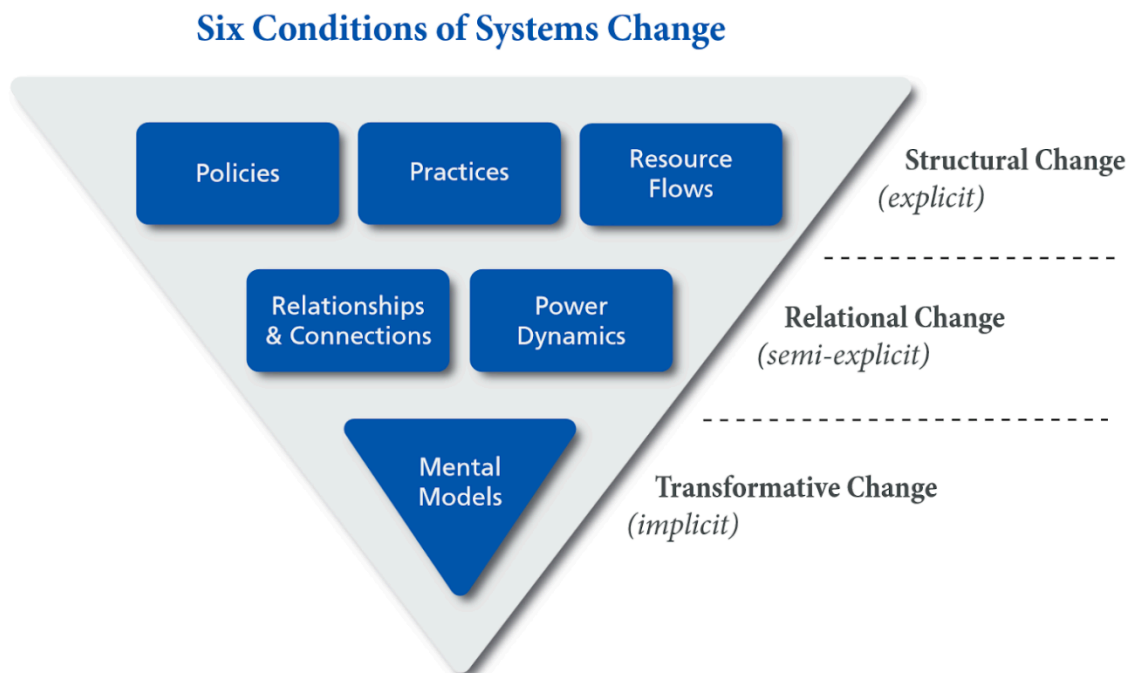
Now, write down which of the goals from those systems is relevant and how it is relevant for your context:

0. Exercise: Mapping the conditions for Systems Change

Material needed: Exercise 10 Solutions landscape; Exercise 13 The Systems lens

Develop solution ideas can also go beyond structural reform and target the deep logic of your system: the distribution of power and the beliefs that shape behaviour.

You might recognise the Six Conditions below from the “Iceberg Model”, which is often used in Communications – Only the top tier is visible, while the lower tiers are mostly hidden from view. Exposing how relationships & connections, power dynamics and mental models influence the system is difficult but necessary to change the System Dynamics.



Choose one systemic problem from your earlier exercises. For example: Which element was missing from the solutions landscape or what behaviour from what actor did you identify using the System Lens?

Step 1: Describe the System Friction Briefly

The Friction in the system:

The situation when this friction occurs:

The stakeholder, who is exhibiting the symptom:

Step 2: Discovering reasons for the Friction

- Relationships and Connections
 - Where is trust missing—or has been broken—between system actors?
 - Which actors are working toward similar goals, but are not currently in communication or coordination?
 - What formal or informal barriers prevent collaboration between key system actors?
- Power Dynamics
 - Who has power vs. who lacks power in this situation?
 - How is power exercised in this situation?
 - Is there a gatekeeping practice?
- Mental Models
 - What do other system actors believe to be true about the stakeholder?
 - What does the stakeholder believe to be true about the target group?
 - What narrative is dominant in the media, political sphere or among system actors?

Example:

“If young people are unemployed, they just aren't trying hard enough.”

“Government doesn't innovate — that's for the private sector.”

Note down which reasons you suspect to be behind the friction:

Step 3: Collect Ideas to change the Conditions

From the uncovered friction and the reasons for that friction, we can now collect ideas to move the levers and change the system conditions. Note down ideas on all three conditions:

Your idea to change Relationships and Connections:

Your ideas to change Power Dynamics:

Your ideas to change Mental Models:

0. Exercise: Storytelling to shift Mental Models

Since Mental Models are very difficult to change, yet have a high leverage over the system, we are taking a Deep Dive here. To learn to use storytelling in order to shift beliefs and assumptions that uphold the status quo — the deepest structures in any system – we will use framing, narratives, and emotional resonance to open hearts and minds.

Step 1: Identify the Mental Model to shift

From your own case (e.g., the system you've analysed in previous modules), write down a mental model that reinforces the current problem.

Your Mental Model, which actor exhibits it:

Examples:

"Unemployed people are just not trying hard enough."

"Citizens are passive recipients, not partners."

"Rural areas don't innovate — they just need help."

Step 2: Describe the Dominant Narrative that supports it

Now, write down the common story, media framing, or political language that reinforces this belief.

Examples:

- Media headlines: “Welfare cheats abuse taxpayer money.”
- A quote from a colleague: “Our job is to provide services, not to involve citizens.”

The Narrative that supports the Mental Model:

Step 3: Reframe the Narrative by using a story

Create a counter-narrative that shifts the focus. Use human-cantered, emotionally resonant framing — just like in successful advocacy campaigns. Try to link back to an existing, and strongly prevailing cultural belief.

For Example: How the US Same-Sex Marriage gained public support

Advocates originally framed the issue as: “This is a human right.”

But this narrative did not win over enough public support. When they reframed it as “It’s about love! You can’t tell someone they can’t marry the person they love.” the narrative linked to an existing and strongly held belief. Since the public already believed that love will win, and that there is a person for everyone (as highly visible in Hollywood movies) it was easier to support the “extension” of this existing belief to also apply for same-sex couples.

Now try this for your issue.

Note down the old framing / the old narrative:

Note down a new framing:

Step 4: Where and How Could You Use This Story?

Choose a specific channel or situation (e.g., community meeting, internal government report, website, social media, team briefing) where this story could challenge assumptions.

Channel or Format:

Audience:

How You'll Know If It Works:

Module 6

0. Exercise: Identifying solutions that fit the problem using Cynefin

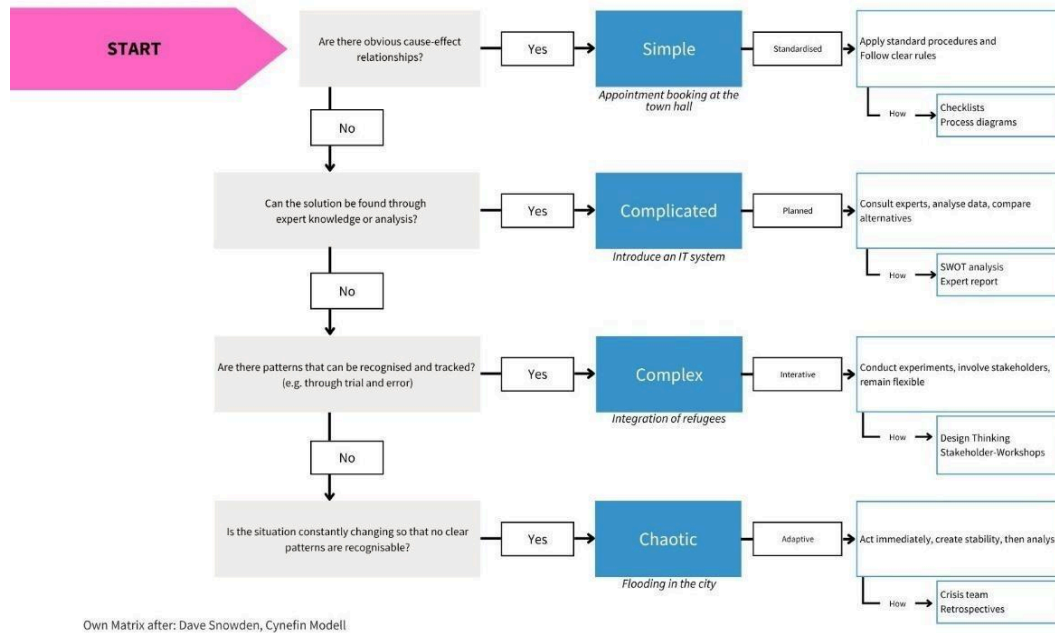
This exercise helps you assess whether the solution you are currently designing fits the nature of your problem. Using the Cynefin model, you will classify your problem type, understand the kind of solution that fits best, and adjust your existing ideas if necessary.

Materials needed:

- Your initial problem description and analysis
- Your current solution sketches

Step 1: Revisit Your Problem Type

Review the problem you are working on and go through the Cynefin flowchart. The model helps you classify the problem as one of the following types. Use the guiding questions in the flowchart to identify where your problem most likely sits and which solution type would be a good fit.



What is your identified problem type?

Which solution types would be suitable?

Step 2: Review your solution ideas to find a good match

Look at the diverse solutions, you have collected in the previous module. Based on the Cynefin category above, find which of your solutions matches the approach suggested.

Write down: Which of my solution matches the approach? Why or why not?

Step 3: Adjust Your Solution Design

Use this space to make changes or additions to your solution to make it fit better to the nature of your problem. You can sketch new elements, remove misaligned ones, or add steps for piloting, expert consultation, or rapid responses—depending on what the Cynefin model recommends.

New or adjusted solution idea:

Step 4: Optional – Discuss your categorisation with a peer or your team. Do they agree with your assessment of the problem type? What would they add or change in the solution?

0. Exercise: Find what you can control

After exploring many possible angles to create a new Social Innovation, we now need to filter for those solutions that are more realistic to achieve. We do that by differentiating what you control vs. what you do not control.

Step 1: Collect all of your solution ideas

Collect all the solution ideas from the previous exercises.

For example:

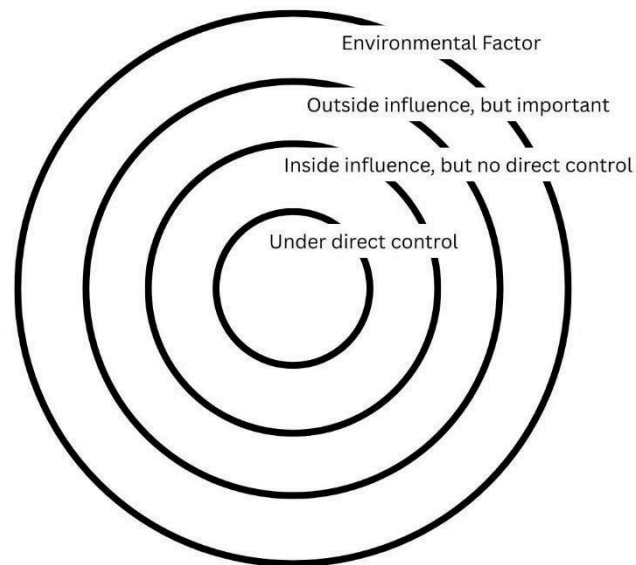
1. The System Lens Role

2. The Changes in System Conditions

3. New Products or Services (i.e. from the Fast Idea Generator)

Step 2: Sort the solutions by level of control

Map out all of your solution ideas in the following circle diagram. You might notice that solutions can be hard to place, when they involve multiple elements. For example: a new Job Coaching program would be in your control (since it falls within the role of your department), but you would need new budgets approved. To make it easier to deal with such dependencies, you can break up such solutions into multiple post-its and connect them with lines, so that you can visualise that multiple circles are involved.



0. Exercise: Exploring laws and budget as boundaries

Two crucial factors are laws and budgets. Most likely they are environmental factors to you, since you might not be situated in the department, which directly controls them or influences them.

Step 1: Collect the relevant laws and budgets

Firstly, we need to collect all relevant items, which are connected to your solution idea. You can use this exercise for any solution idea, and mapping this for many different solutions will give you a good indication how high the chances are at actually implementing the solution.

Solution	Relevant laws governing the solution	Relevant budgets influencing the solution

Step 2: Note their influence on probability

Secondly, we want to see how difficult it might be to change those connected laws and budgets. Here, you can consider which actors could potentially help you with that change and if that actor is likely to support your innovation activities.

Laws, that would need to change:

Budgets, that would need to change:

Step 3: Reflection

Now note down how this influences your decision, which solution to choose:

0. Exercise: Resistance Check

Another important environmental factor, which can be difficult to influence but important for success, are other stakeholders in the system. In order to anticipate resistance, not be blindsided by it and potentially use it to boost your innovation instead of hindering it, we firstly need to make the resistance visible.

Step 1: Collecting stakeholders

Use the table below to select 3–5 key stakeholders who are not beneficiaries, but actors that must change their behaviour, role, or mindset for your solution to succeed (i.e. your target group).

Stakeholders might include:

- Internal departments (e.g. procurement, IT)
- Frontline staff (e.g. teachers, social workers)
- External actors (e.g. NGOs, unions, business partners)
- Political appointees (e.g. ministers, mayors)

The favoured solution thus far:

The most important stakeholders for that solution to succeed:

Step 2: Mapping Stakeholder Resistance

Now answer the guiding questions for each of the stakeholders.

Stakeholder	Current official Role	What do they gain from the new solution?	What might they lose?	Will they need to change mindset, behaviour, or skills?	What is their perceived role in government?

Step 3: Reflection

What engagement strategies could you design to reduce resistance? What bottlenecks can you anticipate during implementation of your new solution? Can you identify unlikely allies, who share your goals?

Step 4: Optional – Change your favoured solution

We have only done this exercise for one solution only. You might see that this particular one is very difficult to implement successfully. Maybe, you have already tried an engagement strategy and one stakeholder is hard to get on board. Here you can now note if you would rather change to a different solution, then to keep building.

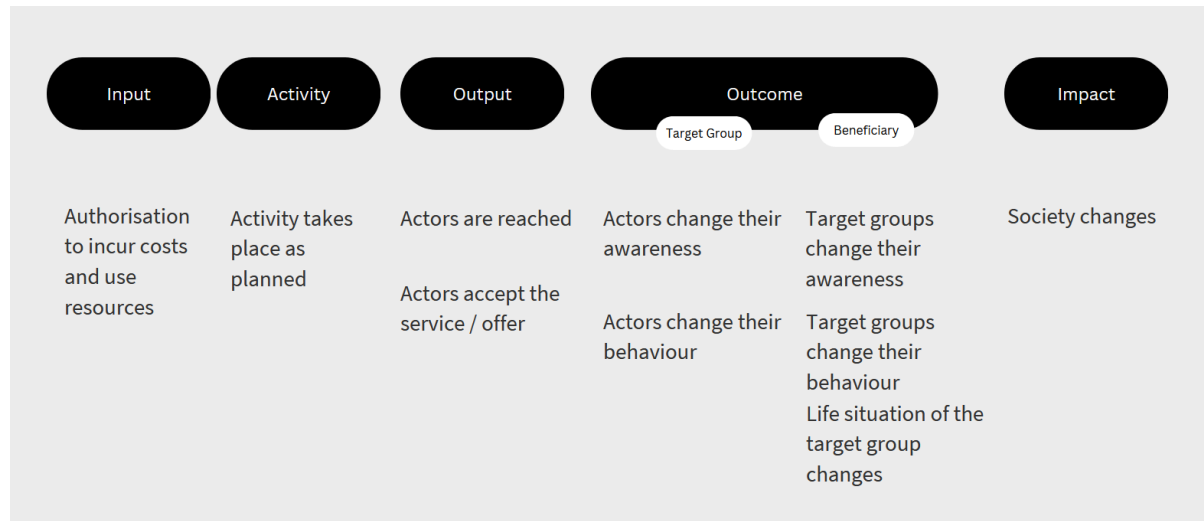
0. Exercise: Building an IAOOI Impact logic model

Since we are now seriously considering one solution, we can now build an impact logic model to plan for the impact measurement of your solution. Remember that the purpose of a successful Social Innovation is to create a positive effect for society.

Therefore, we are now anticipating the impact on society, and the positive change for the beneficiaries as a specific group within society.

Note that the impact logic model is used in the planning phase from the right to left, while the execution will be done from left to right. It might be counter-intuitive to start with the right-hand side.

Material: Your currently favoured solution



Step 1: Creating a Beneficiary Group

Your solution aims at creating a positive change in society, as well as for a specific group within society. Name them here:

The positive change for society (at large): _____

The Beneficiary group should be distinguishable by the following factors.

- Which geographic area this group lives in: _____
- What age this group has: _____
- What gender this group has: _____
- What level of education this group has: _____
- Further differentiating factors: _____

The positive change for the beneficiary: _____

Step 2: Creating a target group

Most likely you also want to create change within the public administration. This can either be, because you have no direct contact to the beneficiary or because your solution entirely targets an internal change (for example: by implementing a new digital solution within public administration, which will make it easier for citizens to reach a service).

Note your target group: _____

The change for the target group: _____

Step 3: Adding Outputs, Activities and Input

Now we can complement the impact logic model with the last remaining steps: Output, Activities and Input. These should be easier to add, when you already know what solution you wish to implement.

0. Exercise: Goals in an impact logic model

One of the most common mistakes in creating new solutions for societal gain is to mix goals. We have gotten to know one type of goal setting in exercise 24 on Writing a Vision statement – a form of a goal, which is very long term and acts more as a guiding principle, rather than an actually achievable goal.

Now, which the Impact logic model from Exercise 38, we can dive into goal along the Impact logic model. The objective here is to clarify what different goals you need to achieve (for example, because of a political mandate) and which ones are impact goals (the long-term goals, which can be directly derived from your vision statement).

Materials needed: The Vision statement from 24 Exercise: Writing your Vision Statement

Step 1: Using Guiding Questions to clarify what is what

The following questions help you to identify different goals.

	Guiding Question	If the answer is YES then it is ...
1	Does the goal describe what is invested or used (e.g., money, staff, time)?	Input Goal
2	Does it describe an action or task carried out (e.g., "conduct training sessions")?	Activity Goal
3	Does it describe something tangible that results from the action (e.g., number of reports, apps developed)?	Output Goal
4	Does it describe a change in behaviour, skills, or condition of the target group or other actors (e.g., "youth are job-ready")?	Outcome Goal
5	Does it describe a broader change in society (e.g. "reduce poverty")?	Impact Goal
6	Does it compare resources used to outputs delivered (e.g., cost per training held)?	Efficiency Goal
7	Does it compare outputs or outcomes to the original objective (e.g., % of youth who found a job after training)?	Effectiveness Goal

Step 2: Note your goals

In the case, that you do not have goals for all 7 questions, you might have to fill them in. The Efficiency and Effectiveness Goals can stay empty; but all other goals should have an answer.

For example, on an Impact Goal:

- Increase: In our new job training for Youth, we need 300.000 Euro to establish a Teacher Training, run a pilot in 3 schools, create necessary materials, do an impact evaluation and a rollout planning. Our goal is to secure this funding from the parliament within 12 months.
- Decrease (Another way of writing an Input Goal would be to state what savings should happen in a solution, which is already established): The current job training needs 20.000 Euros to create a marketing campaign with posters in the city. Our goal is to reduce this funding to 5.000 Euro (added with the Output Goal, that you now want to use that funding for a Social Media campaign instead.)

Note your goals, creating your own Impact logic model. Be as specific as you can be and start from the right side of the logic model as follows:

Impact Goals:

Outcome Goals:

Output Goals:

Activity Goals:

Input Goals:

0. Exercise: Monitoring and measuring using the Impact logic model

An Impact logic model is the most useful, when you can use it for internal steering and (team) external communication. To do that, you need to measure if your assumptions from the beginning actually hold true. You can do that by defining indicators, doing an impact measurement and crafting an impact analysis from it.

While a full impact measurement can be quite expensive, it might be helpful to “just” observe some indicators. This is called a Monitoring.

In contrast, a full evaluation is a more extensive process, which should include qualitative indicators, which require sourcing data through questionnaires or similar tools.

Materials needed: 38 Exercise: Building an IAOOI Impact logic model

Step 1: Collecting Indicators

Firstly, make a list of indicators. An indicator should provide the information whether a goal in the impact logic model was successfully realised or if you are on the right track. For example: The new job training requires the acquisition of 30 teachers, who will join the pilot training. One of your output goals is to reach those 30 teachers and have them all complete the full training. The corresponding indicators are: Number of teachers that have completed the pilot training and number of training hours (both in person and individual study time).

Use your Impact logic model and go through all five pillars. The indicators should include at least the following information:

Name of Indicator	Reference to the Impact logic model	Data Source	First data collection (Result and date)	Target data collection (Result and date)

You can potentially also add: Type of indicator (qualitative or quantitative), the time intervals to which the indicator is available (e.g. a monthly report from a different department), and how the indicator is calculated (e.g. Monthly active users = All users – users with no activity in the last 4 weeks)

Step 2: Deciding for Monitoring or Evaluation

Now you need to decide whether you want to create a full evaluation or a simpler monitoring. One guiding principle could be, how difficult and resource-intensive it will be to do a full evaluation (including e.g. new qualitative data, which you firstly need to collect). Secondly, you need to decide whether those difficulties and resources will still be worth the gain in information. If you can just monitor a few quantitative indicators and still know enough, and be able to see if your solution is successfully creating positive impact – you might want to opt for a monitoring.

Your reflection:

0. Exercise: Actors engagement in your Impact logic model

Getting a clear understanding of the “who is who” in your impact logic model is important to search for allies. There are actors, whom you directly work with, as well as those affected by your new solution. Both of these groups might have people that are for or against the change.

Materials needed: 38 Exercise: Building an IAOOI Impact logic model

Note: this approach to finding allies might look similar to 12 Exercise: Finding partners for Collaboration. But since you now have decided on a solution and built an Impact logic model, this is a much more informed situation, than in Module 2.

Step 1: Collecting actors

Take a detailed look at the actors in your “outcome” tab in your impact logic model. While these are the people, that you wish to influence, they might also be the people that can help you most. Identify who among them will help you and how, write down names and be as specific as you can be.

Step 2: Listing internal and external actors

Make sure that your list includes both people from within and outside government. Sometimes, you might find unlikely allies just by widening your horizon. If you are unsure, ask a trusted colleague for references.

0. Exercise: OKR for your impact logic model

To operationalise your Vision Statement, you can use the OKR Method. This can help to create a connection between activities (which might be disbursed among many teams or departments) and the larger Vision (which might be a shared Vision between those diverse teams or departments).

Materials needed: Results from 1.24 Exercise: Writing your Vision Statement and 1.38 Exercise: Building an IAOOI Impact logic model

Step 1: Formulating Objectives

Go back to your Vision Statement and the corresponding Impact and Outcomes from your Impact logic model. Formulate now, what an Objective could be: The result, that you want to achieve. It should be inspiring, but uncomfortable and should be a target state rather than an activity.

For example: In order to get the new budget approved our objective is to secure political backing for the new program.

Step 2: Formulating Key Results

Key results outline how the objective can be achieved. They are concrete, measurable or quantifiable (partial) successes or results. They should not exceed more than 4 months into the future.

For example: The political leadership will receive a full project briefing by the day x, including a rough calculation and an outline of the anticipated impact. We will include a statement from teachers, who welcome the program as well as testimonials from other cities that already use a similar project successfully (therefore reducing political risk).

You can use the following template to fill in your objectives and corresponding Key Results.

Objective			
What result should be achieved? Inspiring, but uncomfortable. Target state instead of activity.			
Key Results			
How can the objective be achieved? Concrete, measurable or quantifiable partial successes or results. They are SMART.			
Key Results	Target reached	Confidence to reach target	Learning and Next Steps
1			
2			
3			
4			

Step 3: Iterate

The OKR Method is an agile method, which means that there need to be regular reviews of the results as well as of the process.

Plan a review with your team, which should be held either quarterly or every four months. In that review, you evaluate what has worked and what has not worked both in terms of your project and the method itself.

Module 7

1. Exercise: Building Organisational Ambidexterity

Organisations need to be able to deal with fixed and flexible situations, and adapt as needed. We are now taking a look at how you could build this capacity in your organisation.

Organisational ambidexterity refers to an organization's ability to:

- Exploit: Efficiently manage and optimize current operations, processes, or products (focus on short-term performance).
- Explore: Experiment with new ideas, innovate, and adapt to changing environments (focus on long-term adaptation).

Building out your organisations ambidexterity you can create capacity for social innovation by establish the resources needed for yourself or other colleagues to keep innovating in the long-term.

For example: A municipality that keeps running the traditional job fair, but also pilots a new job training and advertises for it using social media – but using different levels of risk tolerance.

Step 1: Identify what is needed

- Are there formal structures or teams within your organization specifically tasked with exploring new ideas or testing innovations?
→ Yes / No / Not sure
If yes, are they integrated into the wider organization or kept separate (e.g., as a lab or pilot team)?
- Do employees have time or resources explicitly allocated to developing or experimenting with new approaches?
→ Yes – regularly / Yes – occasionally / Rarely / Never
- When a new policy, technology, or challenge emerges, how quickly does your organization adapt its processes or offerings?
→ Very quickly / Somewhat quickly / Slowly / Not at all

- Is there psychological safety to propose, test, and fail with new ideas?
→ Yes, widely accepted / Only in certain teams / Rarely / No
- Does your organization reward both operational excellence (doing things right) and innovative thinking (doing the right things)?
→ Yes – both are valued / Operational excellence is valued more / Innovation is valued more / Neither is clearly rewarded
- Are frontline staff involved in shaping or testing innovations, or is innovation driven only from the top?
→ Frontline staff are deeply involved / Some involvement / Mostly top-down / No involvement
- Are there mechanisms (e.g., feedback loops, learning systems) that help your organization learn from pilots or failed innovations?
→ Yes, systematically / Sometimes / Rarely / Never
- When an innovation succeeds, does the organization have a clear process to scale it up or integrate it into regular operations?
→ Yes – it happens frequently / Yes – but inconsistently / Seldom / Not at all
- Is there leadership support for innovation—even if it challenges current norms, hierarchies, or processes?
→ Strong support / Some support / Little support / Resistance from leadership
- Do you personally feel empowered to innovate in your role without waiting for permission?
→ Yes, always / Yes, to some extent / Only with explicit approval / No

Step 2: Reflection

Reflect on the exercise and note any potential steps, you can take to increase your organisations ambidexterity:

0. Exercise: Citizen Participation using the 5 Levels of Engagement

Material: 5 Levels of Engagement

5 Levels of Engagement

1. What's our intent? 2. Where are we now? 3. Where do we need to be? 4. What's necessary to achieve the change we seek?

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Complexity	Clock				Cloud
Level	Inform ¹	Consult ¹	Involve ¹	Collaborate ¹	Co-create
Intent	Understand	Improve ²	Evolve ²	Invent ²	Transform ²
What is co-determined?	Nothing	Problem	Analysis	Solutions	Vision
Example methods	One-way Communication	Arbitration or Direction (another decides)	Mediation/Negotiation	Interest-based Design/ Negotiations	Co-design
Stakeholder experience	"I was updated on a decision."	"I shared my experience with the problem."	"My input was included in the analysis."	"All our needs and interests are shaping the solutions."	"We did it all together, including deciding the vision and goals."
Appropriate for...		Resolving conflict (e.g., over a shared, limited resource)	Finding a more agreeable resolution to the focal problem	Designing win-win solutions to a complex shared problem	Co-designing and actualizing a shared future that works for all
Challenges	Making sure the communications "land" and are meaningful	Getting people to agree that the problem is a problem and that it's their problem too	Ensuring that the analysis draws in enough diversity of experience and perspective	Setting aside favored solutions to allow genuine collaboration	Helping people work together effectively across differences around a deeply shared intent

This exercise will help you identify your current level of engagement with citizens and develop concrete ideas to move toward deeper collaboration and co-creation.

Step 1: Quick Self-Assessment on current engagement

Read each level below. Then mark the ones that best describe how you currently engage citizens in your project or organisation.

Level	Engagement Style	Description	Applies
1	Inform	You share information with citizens (e.g. public announcements, reports).	[]
2	Consult	You collect input from citizens (e.g. surveys, public hearings).	[]
3	Involve	Citizen input shapes analysis (e.g. workshops, interviews).	[]
4	Collaborate	Citizens co-design solutions with you.	[]
5	Co-Create	Citizens are part of vision-setting, problem-solving, and implementation.	[]

Optional: If you answered for your entire organisation or department, you can add if the approach is rather homogenous or different between different parts of the organisation or department.

Step 2: Anticipating the next Level

Now imagine you want to move one level up from where you currently are. Use the guiding questions below:

- What would a deeper level of engagement look like?
 - Which level is the next “one up”?
 - What would people do differently?
 - Where / in which project or workstream could this take place?
- What would need to change in the process or mindset of the stakeholders involved?
 - Would it require more trust, time, facilitation, budget etc.?
 - What internal or external barriers do you anticipate?

Step 3: Planning to move one Level up

With your status-quo and reflection in mind, design one small action that you could take in the next 30 days, to increase the engagement level. Can this small action take you one level up? If not, what would be necessary to get you there?

Your activity:

Step 4: Optional Group Activity

Ask a colleague or peer group, to gather further solution ideas. The following questions can guide that discussion:

- What else could be needed to reach the next level of engagement?
- Are there examples where the higher level of engagement was already used? How did that go and is there anything you can learn from that situation?
- What assumptions do your colleagues or peers have about the higher level of engagement like Co-Creation? Where do they see barriers to this level to becoming a success for your organisation?

Your Observations:

0. Exercise: Storytelling to different audiences

This exercise will help you create two tailored narratives: one to convince critical or sceptical stakeholders, and another to inspire allies who already share the same

vision. The exercise builds storytelling skills and strategic thinking about framing and motivation.

Materials needed: Your chosen solution

Step 1: Identify your two target audiences

Describe two specific groups or individuals:

- Audience A: The critical or sceptical stakeholder who holds influence or resources
- Audience B: An ally or like-minded actor who is supportive but not yet involved

Write 2-3 sentences to describe what each audience values, fears, or is motivated by:

Step 2: Choose your message structure

Use the following four-part story structure for each version:

- Starting point – What is the current situation or challenge?
- Turning point – What insight or experience led to the idea for change?
- Vision – What does the better future look like?
- Call to action – What role should the audience play to move this vision forward?

Audience A Story Outline:

Audience B Story Outline:

Step 3: Craft your first story (Audience A)

Write a short story (150–250 words) to convince your critical stakeholder.

Focus on evidence, risks of inaction, and shared public interest. Use a tone that respects their concerns and avoids confrontation.

Step 4: Craft your second story (Audience B)

Write a second story (150–250 words) to bring your ally on board.

Focus on shared values, the opportunity to act together, and the excitement of leading change. Use an energizing and hopeful tone.

Step 5: Optional peer-to-peer extension

Pair up with a trusted colleague. Read your two stories to them and ask for feedback:

- Does the story resonate with the intended audience?
- What part was most convincing or engaging?
- Where could the framing be sharper?

Rewrite your stories with these insights.

0. Exercise: Embedding Indicators from your Impact logic model

This exercise helps you move from designing indicators to embedding them into existing routines, roles, or systems in your organisation. You will also explore how to link your indicators to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to build political or strategic support.

Materials needed: Your Impact logic model from 38 Exercise: Building an IAOOI Impact logic model and Indicators from 40 Exercise: Monitoring and measuring using the Impact logic model and an overview of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Step 1: Choosing Key Indicators to Embed

Review your indicator list from Module 6. Highlight 3–5 indicators that are the most important for showing whether your innovation is on track. Focus on those that

- have a clear data source
- can be collected regularly
- are useful for decision-making

Write down your selected indicators here:

Step 2: Finding a Place in the Organisation

For each indicator, ask yourself:

- Where does this data already exist in the organisation?

- Who is currently responsible for this data—or could be?
- Which team meeting, reporting cycle, or dashboard could include this?

Repeat for all your selected indicators

Indicator	Where does it currently exist?	Who is currently responsible?	Where is it currently used?

Step 3: Creating an Embedding Plan

Now turn this into a simple plan. For each indicator, add the following information:

Indicator	Where would it exist in the future?	Who would be responsible?	Where could it be used?

Step 4: Linking Indicators to SDGs for Political Backing

Now review the SDG overview. For each of your key indicators, identify one SDG (or SDG sub goal) that it contributes to. This step helps you build legitimacy and alignment with broader policy priorities.

Indicator	Which SDG does this relate to?	How does this indicator contribute to that SDG?	How could this connection help build political support?

Write down which next steps you can take to embed the indicators into your organisation:

0. Exercise: Risk and de-risking taking action for yourself and others

This exercise helps you reflect on the personal and institutional risks and benefits related to taking action on your social innovation project. It also helps you identify how to reduce these risks—for yourself and for others whose support or initiative you need.

Materials needed: Your current social innovation idea

Step 1: Understand Your Own Risk Landscape

Think about yourself in your current position. Reflect honestly on what it would mean to act—or not act—on your social innovation idea.

Which benefits might I experience by taking action? (e.g. impact, visibility, motivation, professional growth)

Which risks might I face by taking action? (e.g. failure, political fallout, friction with superiors)

Which risks might I face by not taking action? (e.g. project stagnation, losing momentum, missed opportunity)

Now reflect: What is one small step I can take that feels low-risk but still meaningful?

Step 2: Map the Risk Landscape of a Key Stakeholder

Choose a public servant you need for your idea to progress. This could be a team leader, department head, or peer from another unit.

Write down their name or role (just for you): _____

Which benefits might they experience if they support or take action on this project?

Which risks might they associate with taking action? (e.g. political exposure, extra workload, stepping outside norms)

Which risks might they face if no action is taken? (e.g. problem worsens, lack of leadership, public pressure later on)

Step 3: De-risk the Path Forward

Now, think of specific ways to reduce perceived or actual risks—both for yourself and your stakeholder.

What could help reduce fear of action? Which of the following could help?

- Creating a pilot or reversible test phase
- Framing the action as aligned with higher-level strategies (e.g. SDGs, mission statements)
- Involving respected allies early on
- Using language that focuses on opportunity, not change
- Sharing data that supports urgency
- Framing the action as “starting small” or “trying something” rather than committing to large change
- Asking for permission to explore, not to change

Now write down:

One way I can reduce risk for myself:

One way I can reduce risk for the stakeholder I need:

0. Exercise: Writing a Mission Statement

The purpose of this exercise is to articulate your mission: the specific role your organisation or team will take to contribute to the larger vision. Your mission helps clarify how you aim to create change, what you focus on, and where your responsibility begins and ends. It should be aspirational yet grounded in the reality of your role.

Material needed:

- Your problem Statement
- Your Vision Statement
- Your Chosen Solution

Step 1: Your Mission Statement

Think about the unique role your organisation (or unit) can play in contributing to the vision.

Ask yourself:

- What makes our role distinct or necessary in this context?
- What specific action, approach or perspective do we bring?
- Who are we serving or supporting in our work?

Some helpful sentence starters to explore:

We support change by...

We enable...

We empower...

We create the conditions for...

We focus on...

Write freely, test different phrasings, and pick one that feels true and clear.

Write your draft mission here:

We (or I) will contribute to the vision _____ by

_____ (using a high level narrative, instead of a direct solution).

Step 2: Test and Strengthen Your Mission

Now read your draft mission aloud. Ask:

- Is this mission focused on your specific contribution, not the entire vision?
- Does it avoid simply re-stating the solution or activities?
- Is it understandable to someone unfamiliar with your project?
- Does it help you explain your work to an internal team and external partners?

Optional: Rewrite it for clarity or inspiration, while staying realistic.

Module 8

0. Exercise: Dealing with conflict of impact goals

To help you manage conflicting goals in a transparent and constructive way, using structured reflection and prioritisation tools. You will work through your own impact goals, identify conflicts, and define ways to handle them in your organisational context.

Note: We are only looking at the conflicts between impact goals. We are excluding any time of other goal (for example, input goals). You can also do this exercise for different types of goals.

Materials needed: Your existing impact logic model or goal system

Step 1: Make the Conflict Visible

Choose two impact goals in your project or organisation that seem to be in conflict. For example: Increasing access to job training as well as using teachers time to integrate students with disabilities.

Write them down clearly and briefly describe the source of tension.

Now answer:

- Are these impact goals both explicitly documented?
- Which of them is a must-goal (non-negotiable)? Which is a can-goal (flexible)?
- Have these goals been made visible to others in your team or organisation?

Reflection: How has your organisation previously dealt with conflicting goals?

Step 2: Weigh and Prioritise the Goals

Choose one of the following methods to analyse your goal conflict:

- Option 1: Cost-Benefit Reflection

Which goal, if fulfilled, would bring the greatest impact to your organisation or society?

What are the opportunity costs of prioritising one over the other?

- Option 2: Weighting Matrix

Assign a weight to each goal based on organisational strategy, stakeholder interest, urgency, and feasibility (e.g., 1–5 scale).

Then calculate a simple score to guide your decision.

- Option 3: Time Horizon View

Could one of the goals be fulfilled later without major consequences?

Would a short-term compromise enable long-term alignment?

Reflection:

Does this analysis shift your understanding of what should take priority?

Step 3: Create a Strategy for Dealing with the Conflict

Use the ideas below to sketch a handling strategy:

- Could you redesign your solution to accommodate partial progress on both goals?
 - Could you compensate one goal (e.g. reduced quality) by reinforcing it elsewhere (e.g. additional follow-up services)?
 - Would it help to broaden the system boundaries—e.g., by involving a partner organisation or redefining success metrics?
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Step 4: Optional – Involve another stakeholder

Who else is affected by this goal conflict? Set up a short conversation or feedback session to validate your priorities.

0. Exercise: Checklist – Addressing Gaps and Barriers in Public Sector Innovation

Use this checklist to reflect on common system-level challenges and how you might begin to address them in your own context.

Step 1: Reflect on Each Challenge

Read through each of the listed system-level barriers. For each one, ask yourself the question provided. Take your time and reflect honestly on whether this issue shows up in your own organisation or context.

Step 2: Note the Ones That Apply

As you go through the list, place a small mark next to the challenges that apply to your current project or environment. You don't have to address all of them—choose one or two that seem most urgent or possible to act on now.

Step 3: Choose a Concrete Action

For each relevant challenge, read the accompanying suggestion. Decide which small step you will take this week to begin addressing the challenge in your context.

System-Level Barriers:

- Legal and regulatory rigidity
Question: Are there outdated laws or regulations that limit your innovation?
Suggestion: Identify one rule or regulation that could be updated, and talk to your legal or compliance colleagues about its history.
- Fragmented governance and siloed administration
Question: Do you work across departments or is your innovation stuck within one silo?
Suggestion: Initiate an informal coordination meeting or coffee chat with someone in another department who shares a similar concern.
- Political discontinuity and lack of institutional memory
Question: Does your innovation rely too heavily on one political champion?
Suggestion: Start documenting your project with clear impact rationale and stakeholder commitments, to survive political change.
- Slow adaptation of national frameworks to local innovation
Question: Are national policies blocking what you could do locally?
Suggestion: Reach out to your local policy advocacy network or umbrella organisations to explore what is already being done elsewhere.
- Short-term funding cycles
Question: Is your work designed around project timelines rather than long-term needs?
Suggestion: Identify one core process you could continue even without new funding—what would that be?
- Lack of institutional embedding
Question: Could your work become part of routine practice?
Suggestion: Talk with a line manager or admin team about how one key element might be formalised into planning or reporting cycles.
- Limited national frameworks for replication
Question: If this worked in your city, could it be adapted elsewhere?
Suggestion: Draft a 1-pager summary for replication and see how others respond to it (even informally).
- Context-specific models
Question: Does your approach only work because of very unique local factors?
Suggestion: List three principles behind your work—then test if they hold elsewhere.

- Scaling barriers in rural or underserved areas
Question: Have you considered how rural areas could adopt your solution?
Suggestion: Talk to someone in a different region or administrative unit and ask what they would need to make it work.
- Lack of long-term ownership and continuity
Question: Is there a clear person or institution who will carry this forward?
Suggestion: Set up a check-in with a potential institutional partner to explore long-term responsibility.
- Participation and co-creation levels
Question: What level of engagement are you currently working at? (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Co-Create)
Suggestion: Consider shifting one decision-making moment to the next level of engagement—start with something low-risk.
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Social Innovation in Public Administration

Case Studies

About this document

This collection of Case Studies is an annex to the *Social Innovation in Public Administration Curriculum*. Its contents are based (if not otherwise indicated) on the Study Report *Mapping of Social Innovation Practices in the PA*.

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gov.gr

gov.gr is Greece's flagship digital transformation initiative, launched in 2020 by the Ministry of Digital Governance. It consolidates over 1,500 public services into a single digital portal, enabling citizens to access services such as tax filings, health records, and civil documentation online. The platform is rapidly scaled during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring uninterrupted access to essential services.

The platform targets all Greek residents and businesses, as well as non-Greek speakers (since the introduction of an English interface in April 2023). gov.gr offers tools such as electronic signatures, a digital inbox, and mobile authentication via tax and banking credentials.

Target Population

The target population of gov.gr is the general citizenry. The platform adopts a universalistic approach, aiming to improve the quality of life for all residents in Greece. It provides access to over 1,500 public services online, significantly improving accessibility for citizens.

Social Needs Addressed

gov.gr addresses the need for streamlined bureaucracy and enhanced citizen access to public services. It responds to long-standing challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiency, fragmented service delivery, and limited accessibility—particularly affecting rural, elderly, and disabled populations.

Types of Innovation

gov.gr represents a service innovation. It introduces novel and redesigned services that improve accessibility, personalization, and efficiency. The platform functions as a one-stop digital portal, consolidating public services to simplify and modernize citizen interactions with the state.

At the same time the innovation is both technological and organizational. It addresses persistent bureaucratic challenges and aims to improve service delivery for all citizens. Strong political leadership, alignment with European Union digitalization goals, and the urgency of the pandemic context serve as key enablers of its implementation.

Sustainability and Scalability

gov.gr is not a temporary pilot but is institutionalized and scaled nationwide. It consolidates over 1,500 services and becomes a core part of Greece's digital governance infrastructure. Unlike many digital initiatives that remain small-scale, gov.gr achieves both scale and sustainability due to strong political support and coordination across ministries.

Participation and Co-Creation Gaps

gov.gr improves access to public services but demonstrates limited participation and co-creation. It operates primarily at Level 1 of the engagement spectrum: "Inform." Citizens are updated about decisions and the availability of new services but are not significantly involved in the design or prioritization process. The development is largely top-down, with minimal user testing or collaborative input.

The platform is developed with support from the private sector. However, civil society engagement in its design is limited. Funding comes from national budgets and EU digital transformation programs.

Tangible and Intangible Value

The platform delivers both tangible and intangible value. Tangibly, it consolidates over 1,500 public services into one digital portal, reduces bureaucracy, and enhances service accessibility. Intangibly, it contributes to improved citizen satisfaction and builds trust in public institutions by demonstrating the capacity of the state to deliver effective digital solutions.

The platform has a profound impact. It significantly reduces administrative burdens, increases citizen satisfaction, and strengthens public trust in institutions. It also institutionalizes digital governance, setting a precedent for future reforms. Despite these achievements, the platform continues to face challenges, especially in addressing the digital divide and ensuring inclusive access for all users.

Deep Dive on the Problem

Before gov.gr, Greek citizens faced a fragmented administrative system—each agency or municipality used its own portal and forms, requiring in-person visits, paper submissions, and long wait times. Despite early efforts since the 1990s (e.g.,

SYZEFXIS network, Taxisnet, HERMES portal), services remained siloed and lacked unified access. With over 500 digital services by its 2020 beta launch, the system still required users to learn numerous interfaces and navigate complex procedural steps. The outbreak of COVID-19 dramatically increased demand for remote access to government functions—such as test and vaccination certificates, business authorizations, and legal documents—spotlighting the urgent need for a fast, integrated solution. Thus, the core issue addressed by gov.gr was how to reduce bureaucracy, unify access, and maintain service continuity under crisis conditions.

Deep Dive on the Solution & Societal Benefit

gov.gr serves as a one-stop digital gateway for citizens and businesses, consolidating more than 1,500 services like tax filings, health data, civil documentation, and digital signatures. It transformed public service delivery by eliminating bureaucratic silos and reducing the need for in-person visits—especially benefiting rural, elderly, and disabled populations. By improving access, particularly to citizens in rural areas, this is a great example of a national solution driving concrete and local benefit. During the pandemic, gov.gr ensured uninterrupted access to care, legal, and administrative services, significantly boosting citizen satisfaction. Usage statistics underscore the impact: over 7.9 million unique users, nearly 160 million documents issued, and a satisfaction rate above 95%. It also accelerated digital culture with the integration of an AI assistant (mAigov), which handled over 1.6 million inquiries. National surveys rank gov.gr among the top 2 services in Greece for user experience. By standardizing public interactions, reinforcing trust, and institutionalizing digital governance, gov.gr exemplifies sustainable, society-wide transformation: reduced administrative burdens, enhanced accessibility, and stronger legitimacy of public institutions.

Larisa Learning City

Larissa Learning City places citizens at the center of their community by offering opportunities for lifelong learning, education, and active participation in civic and cultural life. Through collaboration between the public sector and civil society, it implements inclusive initiatives that address residents' needs, especially those of vulnerable groups. Committed to social inclusion and equal opportunities, the city promotes entrepreneurship, preserves cultural heritage, and fosters sustainable development. As a **member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities**, Larissa stands as a model of how knowledge, cooperation, and inclusion can drive holistic growth and social well-being.

Deep Dive on the Problem

Before the establishment of **Larissa Learning City** and its integration into the **UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities**, adult education in Larissa was fragmented, underfunded, and largely theoretical. The city lacked a coordinated lifelong learning strategy and a culture that encouraged learning across all stages of

life. Many adults—particularly older citizens and unemployed individuals—had limited access to modern digital tools, basic financial literacy, and essential soft skills required in today's labour market. Educational centers were underutilized, workshops were infrequent and poorly aligned with local needs, and learning opportunities were confined to rigid schedules. The absence of structured lifelong learning pathways hindered social inclusion and citizens' ability to adapt to the rapidly changing civic and technological landscape, resulting in a growing gap between residents' evolving needs and the municipality's capacity to address them.

Deep Dive on the Solution & Societal Benefit

Larissa Learning City represents a strategic transformation of Larissa into a dynamic **learning ecosystem**, rather than simply a network of repurposed education centers. It has turned idle adult education facilities and community spaces into open, inclusive learning hubs that connect municipal services, local organizations, and citizens through shared learning experiences. By offering free and hybrid courses on **digital literacy, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and creative skills**, the city integrates online and face-to-face learning to ensure accessibility for working adults and older residents. This holistic approach fosters a **city-wide culture of continuous learning**, broadens employment opportunities, promotes volunteerism, and strengthens social cohesion. At the same time, it enhances the legitimacy and trust in public administration by positioning the municipality as both a **facilitator and enabler of lifelong learning and active citizenship**.

Participatory Budgeting in Timișoara

Timișoara's participatory budgeting (PB) initiative was officially launched in April 2022 as part of the city's Open Government Partnership action plan. It engages citizens across neighborhoods—especially youth and civic groups—to submit, deliberate, and vote on local projects funded by a predetermined budget portion. A digital platform supports proposals, comments, and voting. Stakeholders include the municipality, NGOs, youth foundations, and civil society representatives.

Deep Dive on the Problem

Prior to the program, citizens had little influence over municipal spending decisions. Public debates and consultations were sporadic, participation rates were extremely low (under 0.2%), and the process lacked transparency. Existing laws mandated citizen input only in limited contexts, such as petitions, but without obligation to make contributions public or explain decisions. This lack of engagement fostered distrust and disengagement from civic life, reducing government accountability and inhibiting responsive public administration.

Deep Dive on the Solution & Societal Benefit

Timișoara's PB reform introduced a transparent, inclusive, and digital budgeting process. Citizens can submit and support projects through an online platform; an advisory commission of municipal and civic representatives evaluates proposals; and funding is allocated to at least seven citizen-approved initiatives. The first cycle engaged around 1% of the city's population, with over a hundred ideas submitted and thousands of votes cast. The system improved civic participation, accountability, and empowered communities to co-decide public investments, strengthening trust and building a more responsive local government.

M100 National Hub

The M100 National Hub in Greece is part of a broader Media Futures Europe initiative backed by the M100 Sanssouci Colloquium in Germany. Established around 2021, it fosters innovation in public service media. The Greek hub convenes public broadcasters, startups, NGOs, and academic institutions to pilot new multimedia formats, fact-checking tools, and community reporting methods. Target groups include journalists, civic media practitioners, and citizens interested in media literacy and democratic dialogue.

Deep Dive on the Problem

Public service media in Greece historically faced challenges: low public trust, outdated formats, and poor engagement with younger audiences. Journalists and smaller civic outlets lacked the capacity and resources to experiment with new media formats, and there was fragmentation across traditional and community media. This risked reducing the pluralism and quality of public discourse, weakening democratic participation and media accountability.

Deep Dive on the Solution & Societal Benefit

Through the M100 National Hub, media actors receive funding, mentoring, and networked collaboration to pilot innovative journalism formats, fact-checking platforms, and cross-border thematic programs. This strengthens media pluralism and civic dialogue, improves public trust, and engages citizens—especially youth—in informed public debate. The hub contributes to building a more resilient, democratic media ecosystem.

Community Centres Network

The **Community Centres Network**, launched in 2017 under the *Operational Programme “Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning” (ESPA 2014–2020)* and extended under the **ESF+ 2021–2027**, operates as a nationwide system of **municipal one-stop support hubs** coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. With **244 centres** across Greece and **mobile units** in remote areas, it bridges citizens with public services at municipal, regional, and national levels.

Focusing on **marginalized groups**—such as Roma, migrants, refugees, and the elderly—it provides access to **welfare benefits, employment support, legal aid, and family counseling**, while collaborating with **local NGOs, schools, employment services, and healthcare providers** to strengthen social inclusion and community well-being.

Deep Dive on the Problem

Before the establishment of the **Community Centres Network** in 2017, Greece lacked a **unified national structure** for the outreach and coordination of social services at the local level. Many citizens—particularly those in **rural areas, Roma settlements, and migrant or refugee communities**—faced limited or no access to social welfare and support mechanisms. Services were **highly centralized**, often difficult to navigate, and rarely adapted to **cultural or linguistic diversity**, leading to social isolation, low awareness of rights, and barriers to integration. The absence of accessible, community-based support prevented vulnerable groups from **claiming basic entitlements** and **participating fully in society**, deepening inequality and exclusion.

Deep Dive on the Solution & Societal Benefit

The **Community Centres Network** delivers **free, inclusive social support** directly within local communities, ensuring that even remote and marginalized populations are reached through **mobile units**. Each Centre provides **culturally and linguistically adapted services**, including **legal aid, employment guidance, and personalized social support plans**. Rather than simply serving beneficiaries, the Centres **empower individuals to exercise their rights** and **integrate into society** through tailored pathways such as targeted referrals, individualized plans, and links with employment and social services. The initiative has **reduced social isolation, improved access to welfare entitlements, and enhanced social cohesion and inclusion** across Greece. By fostering trust in public institutions and promoting self-reliance, it supports the **long-term well-being and empowerment of vulnerable citizens**.

Bollenti Spiriti

Bollenti Spiriti is a youth empowerment program in Puglia that revolutionized public policy by directly funding young people to lead social, cultural, and educational initiatives.

Bollenti Spiriti is recognised in various academic and policy studies as a pioneering case of youth-centred public innovation.

Target Population

Bollenti Spiriti is a youth empowerment programme designed for young people aged 14 to 35 in the Puglia region of Italy. It aims to directly engage youth in shaping

their futures through opportunities in education, employment, entrepreneurship, and civic participation.

Social Needs Addressed

The programme addresses multiple, interlinked social challenges facing the region's youth—namely high unemployment rates, brain drain due to outmigration, and widespread civic disengagement. By creating opportunities for youth-led initiatives, Bollenti Spiriti fosters a sense of agency, community participation, and local development.

Types of Innovation

Bollenti Spiriti introduces both organisational and service-level innovations. It shifts from a welfare-based approach to one grounded in empowerment and co-creation. It simplifies funding mechanisms, making them accessible to informal youth groups, and introduces participatory governance models that allow young people to take the lead in defining and implementing projects. The programme also includes the physical revitalisation of abandoned public buildings into active community and cultural hubs.

Leadership and Institutional Ownership

The Region of Puglia (Regione Puglia) is the driving force behind the programme. Strong, consistent political leadership and long-term institutional commitment are critical to the success and sustainability of Bollenti Spiriti. The regional government not only initiates but also champions the programme throughout its life cycle, ensuring alignment across departments and continuity in implementation.

Stakeholder Engagement

The programme is built around the participation of civil society, especially informal youth collectives and local associations. These groups are central to both the design and delivery of projects. Unlike some other initiatives, private sector engagement is limited, and the public–civil society axis remains the core implementation partnership.

Funding Mechanisms

Bollenti Spiriti is publicly funded, with resources coming from the National Youth Policy Fund and regional budgets. This consistent and targeted funding enables the long-term planning and execution of multiple calls for proposals and training programmes.

Policy and Institutional Challenges

Despite its successes, Bollenti Spiriti highlights systemic weaknesses in Italy's public innovation landscape. One of the major challenges is political discontinuity. The programme's survival and effectiveness are tightly linked to the political leadership in Puglia. Similar programmes in other regions struggle to persist through changes in administration. At the national level, the lack of a formal replication or

institutionalisation mechanism means that Bollenti Spiriti remains a regional exemplar rather than a national standard.

Sustainability and Scalability

While Bollenti Spiriti has a transformative impact in Puglia, its scalability is constrained by the absence of a national framework. More than 2,500 youth-led projects are funded and dozens of public spaces are revitalised. However, efforts to replicate the model in other regions or at the national level face barriers, including political turnover and a lack of institutional memory beyond electoral cycles.

Tangible and Intangible Value

The tangible value of the programme includes direct investments in community spaces, education, and youth entrepreneurship. Intangibly, it shifts the narrative about youth from one of dependency to one of agency. Young people are seen and treated as active co-creators of policy and community life. The programme helps build civic capital and fosters a new generation of engaged citizens in southern Italy.

Evidence of Systemic Shifts

Bollenti Spiriti helps redefine youth policy discourse in Italy. It introduces a new model in which regional governments take an active role in facilitating youth-led development. This represents a shift in rules and norms—moving away from hierarchical planning to co-designed, bottom-up processes. It also contributes to a broader cultural shift: youth are no longer passive recipients of support but recognised as partners in regional development and innovation.

Deep Dive on the Problem

In the early 2000s, the Puglia region of southern Italy faced a complex set of challenges affecting its youth population. High unemployment rates, especially among young people, led to widespread economic insecurity and a growing "brain drain" as educated youth left the region in search of better opportunities. Public policies at the time were largely top-down and welfare-oriented, offering limited opportunities for young people to shape their own futures or participate in civic life. Furthermore, abandoned public spaces and a lack of infrastructure for youth engagement deepened social disconnection. Traditional grant systems and bureaucratic funding channels were not accessible to informal youth collectives or first-time project leaders, further marginalizing them from public innovation. As a result, many young people felt excluded not only from the economy but from public life more broadly. The core issue was not only economic exclusion, but also a lack of trust, agency, and institutional support for youth-led change.

Deep Dive on the Solution & Societal Benefit

Bollenti Spiriti, launched by the Region of Puglia, represents a paradigm shift in regional youth policy. Instead of treating young people as passive recipients of support, the initiative provided them with direct funding, training, and decision-making power to design and implement their own cultural, social, and

educational projects. Public buildings were repurposed into hubs for creativity, collaboration, and community-led innovation. By simplifying funding mechanisms and eliminating bureaucratic hurdles, Bollenti Spiriti made public resources accessible to informal youth groups and first-time applicants. The program was implemented over several years with strong political leadership and consistent regional investment, enabling it to fund over 2,500 projects and activate dozens of public spaces. Beyond material outputs, the initiative redefined youth as legitimate civic actors and revitalized local trust in public institutions. It also demonstrated how regional governments can act as enablers of grassroots innovation. The broader societal benefit lies in creating a new narrative of youth empowerment, civic responsibility, and institutional responsiveness—fostering long-term engagement, skills development, and inclusive governance across the region.

Youth Check Parma

Youth Check Parma is a participatory tool enabling young people to assess the generational impact of public policies, fostering intergenerational justice and civic engagement.

The Youth Check initiative stems from Italy's Generational Impact Assessment (Valutazione di Impatto Generazionale, VIG) and guidelines issued in 2022 under the COVIGE Committee. The tool seeks to flag and assess public policy and investment proposals for their effects on younger generations (Monti & Cioffi 2024; "Legiferare meglio: la valutazione di impatto generazionale..." 2024). The age group typically considered in Youth Check is 14-35 years, aligning with generational fairness goals in broader European regulatory practice.

Target Population

Youth Check in Parma (Italy) is a participatory initiative that enables young people to assess how public policies affect different generations. It gives young citizens a formal role in decision-making about generational impact, ensuring their perspectives are considered in municipal policy.

Social Needs Addressed

The innovation addresses the need for greater civic engagement and participation. In Parma Youth Check institutionalises youth participation in policymaking so that young people are not only consulted but have a structured influence over generational fairness in policies.

Types of Innovation

Youth Check represents relational and cultural innovation by creating new modes of engagement and altering power dynamics between institutions and the youth community. It empowers young people to influence municipal policy, shifting how policies are written and evaluated from a generational lens.

Leadership and Institutional Ownership

The Municipality of Parma has formalised Youth Check by embedding it into its strategic planning. Institutional ownership is strong because the city government treats Youth Check as a permanent tool for generational impact assessment rather than as a temporary pilot.

Stakeholder Engagement

LUISS University co-developed the methodology for assessing generational impacts of municipal policies in Parma. Academic partners contribute to design, methodology, and legitimacy. Young people are key stakeholders in the process; their voices help shape assessments and recommendations.

Funding Mechanisms

Youth Check Parma is funded through regional and municipal budgets. The initiative is supported financially by the local government, which shows commitment to sustaining it.

Policy and Institutional Challenges

One challenge is that national policy or regulation does not yet provide a framework for replicating Youth Check in other municipalities. Parma has demonstrated strong local leadership but lacks national mechanisms that support scale-up or standardisation of generational impact assessments.

Sustainability and Scalability

Despite its success in Parma, Youth Check has limited replication beyond its locality. Its sustainability depends on embedding practices into administrative routines and securing stakeholder buy-in beyond the local level. Scalability is constrained by the absence of national frameworks that encourage or enable similar tools elsewhere in Italy.

Tangible and Intangible Value

Youth Check gives young people a sense of agency and inclusion by enabling them to assess how public policies will affect their generation. It builds social capital and contributes to civic empowerment as youth become active participants rather than passive recipients.

Evidence of Systemic Shifts

Parma introduced a new rule that all municipal policy proposals must be evaluated ex ante for their generational impact. This embeds youth considerations structurally into decision-making. The project is shifting mindsets among both public officials and youth: young people come to see themselves as co-creators of public policy rather than external observers. Therefore, this case uses both “changing rules and norms” as well as “shifting mindsets” as systemic shifts.

Deep Dive on the Problem

Before the Youth Check was introduced in Parma, young people had limited formal avenues to influence public policymaking, even though many public decisions had long-term generational impacts. Traditional governance structures often failed to consider how policies would affect future generations, contributing to a sense of exclusion and political disengagement among youth. Despite being among those most affected by long-term policy outcomes—such as climate action, education reform, or urban development—young people lacked structured mechanisms to assess or shape these policies. The societal issue Youth Check addresses is this gap in intergenerational justice and civic participation: it provides a formal tool for young people to evaluate the generational impact of municipal policies and contribute to more inclusive, forward-looking decision-making.

Deep Dive on the Solution & Societal Benefit

Youth Check Parma provides a structured mechanism for young people to assess the generational impact of municipal policies and contribute meaningfully to local decision-making. Institutionalized by the Municipality of Parma and developed in collaboration with LUISS University, the tool integrates youth perspectives directly into the strategic planning process. It enables systematic evaluations of whether new policies serve the interests of future generations, helping ensure long-term social sustainability and intergenerational fairness. The process empowers young citizens not just as participants but as co-evaluators of public policy, shifting the dynamic from symbolic consultation to substantive influence. This deepens civic engagement, builds public trust, and strengthens the legitimacy of local governance. While rooted in local administration, Youth Check sets a precedent for participatory innovation across Europe by showing how cities can embed youth engagement structurally—without needing top-down mandates or national legislation. Its societal benefit lies in fostering more responsive, inclusive, and future-oriented policymaking that actively involves those most impacted by long-term decisions.