Successful Collaborative practices for Social Innovation Labs

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Introduction

Social Innovation Labs have an unorthodox typology but one common denominator among them is the goal to create inter-organizational collaborations in order to tackle complex problems.

The research suggests that:

1) Labs use the best knowledge acquired in collaboration theory, adapting it to the goal of innovating, creating a new form of collaboration that of the innovative collaboration for systemic change

2) These labs create safe spaces to collaborate by applying the three T’s framework: time, techniques and tools based on human-centred design approaches.

3) The output of many social innovation labs is usually a process that leads to systemic change rather than just a product or service and this process requires time to take place.
Introduction

By looking into the collaborative methodologies of social innovation labs, this study raises important questions in social innovation such as: (1) How do the tools and techniques of innovation apply when considering a process rather than a product and (2) how much time is needed for systemic change to take place.
Content

1. Definition of Social Innovation Labs
2. Innovative collaboration
3. The 3T’s framework
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Definition

“A semi-autonomous organisation that:

• engages diverse participants (from across organizations and sectors)

• on a long-term basis

• for the purpose of creating, elaborating, and prototyping

• solutions to open-ended systemic (social) challenges”

(Gryszkiewicz, Lykourentzou and Toivonen 2016, p.17).
The sector of social innovation labs is:

- “relatively small”—approximately $150 million per year—and **fragmented**, with a majority of the labs in the global north. While still early in its development, the sector is growing quickly in response to increasing demand—about 70 percent of the labs were founded in the last five years” (Bliss and Sahni, 2014).

- somewhat a high **fluctuation** with many short life span, ex: *MindLab* in Denmark)
Labs for social innovation
Innovative Collaboration

- **Exploratory**: (scoping the problem)
  - **Innovative**: (new collaborations and new ideas for potential solutions)
- **Advisory**: (identifying solutions)
- **Confederative**: (drafting and adopting recommendations)
- **Contractual**: (formalising interactions. Ex: R&D consortia)

McNamara (2012)
Innovative Collaboration

• Labs use the best knowledge acquired in collaboration theory, adapting it to the goal of innovating and create new collaborations and new ideas of potential solutions.

• Labs bring stakeholders of high and low decision-making power in the system together for a period of time in which they look eye to eye (for example, an independent seamstress and the buyer of a large clothing brand).

• Labs focus on an emergent and immersive process. The process can be considered part of the outcome of these labs, which differs from the creation of a product or service in more traditional labs.
Innovative Collaboration

**Literature Collaboration Framework**

- **Leadership**: based on consensus and inclusion, lead by convener
- **Diverse Stakeholders**: with social capital, shared resources and shared vision
- **Process**: that promotes trust and shared goals

**Social Innovation Labs Collaboration Framework**

- **Leadership**: based on consensus and inclusion, shared by conveners and facilitators
- **Diverse Stakeholders**: with social capital, shared resources but open to divergent vision
- **Process**: immersive and emergent
3T’s Framework

Safe Spaces

TOOLS

TIME

TECHNIQUE
A social innovation lab does not require a specifically designed space to exist, but it needs to give the sense that it is not business-as-usual and invite individuals to learn, experiment and innovate.
Tools

• Labs are known for their unique experimentation tools designed to create and test new ideas.

• In order to make ideas more tangible and test them, labs use a set of tools based on human-centred design techniques (Ex: modeling and rapid prototyping).

• Before testing, labs offer an array of tools to help generate new ideas (Ex: transformative scenarios).

• Tools are part of teaching process that requires capacity to try, fail, receive feedback.
Techniques

• Labs offer a diverse set of techniques to build the individual’s capacity to listen and learn from others on an eye-to-eye level and take full advantage of stakeholder diversity.

• The process starts with facilitators approaching participants before they are even part of the lab. Once at the lab, participants then have a chance to listen to each other and learn from their experiences by providing individual, pair and group time.

• Techniques discussed in this research, such as democracy of time, paired walks and learning journeys are good examples, out of a virtually endless list of concrete methods to create opportunities for dialogue used by social innovation labs.
• Perhaps time is the most important element of the three T’s framework. The process is emergent and immersive, with each lab meeting lasting 2 or 3 days and taking place on a continuing basis, sometimes repeating itself over years.

• The process requires time because of the diversity of stakeholders involved, the complexity of the issues addressed, and the need to define a strong foundation based on mutual understanding of the problem.

• Time is necessary to widen participants understanding of the system and the problem, to gain trust and to allow innovative solutions to emerge.
Time Paradox

The need for time in social innovation directly conflicts with the concept of time as a competitive advantage from management theory. “Innovation means change and change is measured by innovation per unit of time” (Stalk and Hout, 1990, p.19).

Trying to innovate in short time-frames, would lead to collaborations remaining superficial, leading to insufficient solutions. This might, in turn, reflect poorly on the capacity of social innovation labs to affect systemic change.
# Research Context

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<th>Name</th>
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<td>Nesta</td>
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<td>10+ (since 1998)</td>
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<td>US</td>
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<td>IDEO.org</td>
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<td>Lower poverty through health and finance</td>
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<td>Reos Partner</td>
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<td>la 27eRegion</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Improve public administration</td>
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<td>InCompass</td>
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<td>Sanitation, water and Agriculture</td>
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<td>MindLab</td>
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Research Context

Case Study: Reos Partners, 5 offices in 5 continents, 20 years experience and many topics. Labs studied:

1) Oceans Lab Mexico - SDG practices

2) South Africa Food lab - inclusion of small farmer

3) Brazilian sustainable fashion lab - sustainability and policy
Labs throughout the spectrum give different emphasis on the element of the 3 T’s.
Further research into the balance between tools, techniques and time needed to create systemic change throughout the spectrum of social innovation labs, could strengthen the field as a whole.
Conclusions

- Social Innovation labs are an emergent field with scarce academic coverage.

- Labs tend to be experimental, systemic and social, focusing on creating inter-organizational collaborations seeking innovation for social good.

- Labs do acknowledge the key facilitating characteristics discussed by the collaboration theory (Leadership, Diverse Stakeholders and Communication) adapting them to the context of innovation.

- Labs present a new type of collaboration, which could be referred to as innovative collaboration.

- Labs create safe spaces where individuals can leave behind their organisational voices and collaborate through the three T's framework, referring to time, techniques and tools inspired by the human-centred design-thinking approach.

- Questions raised: How do the tools and techniques of innovation apply when considering a process rather than a product and how much time is needed for systemic change to take place

- Further studies into lab practices across the spectrum of innovation labs, how do the tools and techniques of innovation apply when considering a process rather than a product and how much time is needed for systemic change to take place would be beneficial to the sector.
END
Definition

• Unorthodox typology: civic labs - system innovation labs - Incubators - i-teams - hubs - accelerators, etc…

• Living labs, innovation hubs, corporate R&D labs, communities of practice (CoP), innovation networks, and innovation task forces are not included in this description.
Deductive Analyses

- Leadership: **Conveners** are part of the system, while **facilitators** are experts in creating a process of inclusion and neutral to the topic; together they select the members of the collaboration.

- Diverse stakeholders: Innovation labs welcome **divergent points of view** and believe that participants don’t need to agree in order to collaborate since the goal is to innovate.

- Process: more than communication, labs promote an **immersive** (meetings are days long) and **emergent process** (faithful to the agenda but the content is driven by the members of the collaboration).