Mapping Innovative Experiences

A Brief Methodology Guide

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I. Introduction

Innovators play a fundamental role in the transformation of societies. They are those crazy geniuses that dare to cross the frontiers between the present and the future. They choose new paths to follow and assume the risks of their creativity. They are those guys who make trees grow in deserts and create marvelous possibilities where there was nothing more than problems.

Some innovators become famous and very rich people. But these are a minority. In our societies there are a multitude of innovators who daily are inventing and re-inventing more effective ways of resolving problems and/or carrying out their economic, institutional, and educational activities that remain unidentified and unacknowledged.

Innovators create new ways of serving, develop new teaching methods, invent effective conservation practices, develop new methods of institutional management, perfect methods of governance, rescue languages that are at risk of extinction, experiment with Mayan musical instruments, develop national cuisine, utilize technology in novel ways, etc, etc. Many of them work in groups, as leaders of institutions and businesses, and have demonstrated great ability to generate surroundings full of innovation and creativity.

Nevertheless, most innovators are unknown. They do their work silently and anonymously. Many are only partially successful or fail in their initiatives due to reasons easily solvable by other social actors from which innovators are disconnected. Many of their innovations never realize their potentially great usefulness for others; never combine with other innovations that could multiply their value. Ironically, these realities often flow from innovators’ lack of awareness of their innovations and innovations’ relevance for other people.

In the Knowledge Fair held in El Salvador in 2006, we were able to appreciate the richness of innovations that are occurring in developing societies and how elusive the attempts to offer effective support to the innovators can be. In order to help the groups of innovators in understanding their innovation processes and to strengthen the support to them, we have developed this Guide to promoting innovative experiences.

The development of this method has been done with the active participation of all those who participated in the workshop in San Salvador, August 13-16, 2007. It was led by Sebastiao Ferreira (MIT) and Claudia Canepa (CARE USA). This is a work in process. Any comment is well come.
The Intention of the Method

The general intention of the method is to conduct a process of analytical reconstruction of innovative experiences that will help their understanding, as much on the part of the participants as for the social innovation promoters. The method has some specific intentions:

a) To understand the process of the innovative experience, its phases and its points of breakdown and why they occurred.

b) To identify the main innovations that has been done, to characterize the innovative process and its dynamics.

c) To understand the present situation of the experience and its strategic perspectives.

d) To identify the support required so that the experience can develop to its full potential.

Those intentions are achieved by means of a reconstruction of the experience in which the participants are invited to rethink their ideas, review the evidence and reconsider their interpretation.

For the participants and for the facilitator the application of the method makes it possible to acquire a new, more profound and more coherent understanding of the innovative experience, and to identify where help may be more effective in developing the experience.

Finally, the application of the method by a variety of persons will contribute to the development of an analytic tool for innovative experiences and to the improvement of the cognitive resources of the promoters of social innovation.

The Principles of the Method

1. Any process with an innovator group ought to be adapted to their cognitive idiosyncrasies. The specific steps of the method, the language and the terminology used in conversations, the facilitator’s style and the surroundings ought to be friendly to the innovator group. The facilitator ought to be careful to verify whether his language is contributing to what the participants are expressing or is generating barriers to their expressions.

2. The use of knowledge ought to be agreed in advance by the participants. If the facilitator contributes well to the generation of knowledge, it should be clear that the innovator group has the right to decide what it is going to be done with the knowledge generated. The experience that will be recovered and analyzed was lived by the innovators and the knowledge derived from that process belongs to them. It may be that the knowledge generated is different from what was expected at the beginning of the
process; therefore it is a good idea to clarify again at the end how the results of the process will be used; what elements can be disseminated openly and what other elements should be held back. The facilitator has an obligation to respect these agreements.

3. When the group has difficulty in articulating an idea, the facilitator ought to develop tools and cognitive resources (cards, questions, matrices, conceptual maps, diagrams, tables, time lines, etc) at real time for helping the group advance gradually.

4. The knowledge generated should be expressed in a way that the innovators can use it after. That means that the level of abstraction, the format, the language, and terminology in which the knowledge will be expressed ought to be consistent with the way in which the innovator group expresses and recognizes its ideas. The form ought to be adapted to the users and not to the facilitator. The results ought to be expressed in a way that the members of the innovator group will feel comfortable reusing them in the future.

5. The energy flow of the participants ought to define the way in which the process is advanced. The intelligence and the intellectual effort have to be sustained by the enthusiasm of the participants. It is true that time is worth more than money. But it is also true that people’s energy is worth more than time. The facilitator ought to be especially attentive to the energy flow of the group, to their emotions (happy, worried and sad), blockages, difficulties with respect to certain topics, etc. This could call for a lot of empathy, sensitiveness and intelligence. The atmosphere should always be one of satisfaction; even when delicate topics are being addressed. Don’t forget that the ability to do deep analysis depends on the level of enthusiasm that the group feels about the topics that are being discussed. Each discovery made by the group should be highlighted so that the group advancement in the process is clearly perceived.

6. The story depends on who tells it. The composition of the group that participates in the reconstruction of the experience should be representative of its most important moments and of the multiple actors who lived the experience. The innovation carried out may have been the result of a combination of capabilities and perspectives. Having diverse sources and perspectives for telling the story can be of great value in discovering the innovation and to understand the innovative process.

It can be a good idea if, in previous conversations, a preliminary review of the experience is done in order to identify who ought to be in the exercise to identify innovations, to describe the innovative process and to explore possibilities of future.
Conditions of Applicability

The innovative groups are diverse and their experiences are even more diverse. This means that whatever method is to be applied with them should be a flexible one.

It may be that the innovative group is made up of persons with intellectual and analytical traditions, who feel comfortable with a more abstract and technical terminology. It may be that the innovative group is made up of very pragmatic persons and they won’t feel comfortable with sophisticated language. It can also be the case that the group will have very unique social and/or cultural characteristics and that those characteristics are little known by the facilitator.

It is known that the innovators are very good at innovating but that, generally, they are not so good at understanding or explaining their innovations. The facilitator should assume that the innovations done by the majority of the innovative groups are not clear to them and that the first expressions may be very confused and even deceiving.

The application of the method ought to be understood as an exploratory process of de-construction (reverse engineering) and of reinterpretation of the experience, a re-learning activity of what we already know, as much for the participants as for the facilitator.

For the facilitator, especially, the application of the method is going to mean leaving many of his ideas aside and following the thread of the others’ ideas; leaving aside his way of understanding things to help others to develop their own ideas. That doesn’t mean that the facilitator renounces his knowledge and ideas, it means that the facilitator puts his knowledge and ideas at the service of others’ thinking, channeling them in the form of questions and of cognitive tools so that his counterparts manage to construct their own knowledge and to better understand their experiences.

The facilitator ought to take the process of the workshops as an emerging phenomenon, that is to say, as a process of discovery where all those involved work at the frontiers of their knowledge, incorporating the discoveries as elements that influence the next steps and the way in which they are carried out.

Some Assumptions behind the Method

The current method of analysis of innovative experiences is based on some specific assumptions.

1) We assume that the majority of innovators don’t have a clear awareness of their innovations or of the innovative processes that they carry out. The method proposes to help them to better understand what they do.
2) The method seeks to understand innovative experiences that were carried out by persons or groups of people in the context of their economic, institutional and social activities. It doesn’t refer to the innovative processes that occur in universities or in corporation’s laboratories, under controlled conditions.

3) The method seeks to understand the innovations that occur in the effort of achieving an objective, as a necessary change in realigning an experience with its objectives.

4) It is based on the assumption that the majority of innovations are in response to challenges, are efforts to solve problems that have resisted our usual responses, are creative reactions to the inefficiency of the way we are used to do things.

5) We know that exist people who innovate simply because they like to, because they have a creative genius that compels them toward the unknown, toward experimentation, like children and some adolescents. But we believe that the great majority of innovations done by adults are stimulated by a problem or need.
The Method

The method has four great moments: the experience, the innovation, the situation and the future.

Identification of the experience

The identification of an innovative experience is a prerequisite for the application of the method. All experiences contain elements of innovation. The initial evaluation consists of estimating whether the innovations that the experience bears are valuable enough to merit the effort needed for an in-depth analysis.

The social and economic environment in which innovative experiences are developed can be favorable or unfavorable. If the environment is unfavorable, even though an innovation is very valuable, it can show low levels of success or be successful only on a very small scale. Therefore the level of success and the scale of experiences cannot be the only criteria for identifying an innovative experience.

Naturally, if an innovative experience has generated notable success and has reached a significant scale, it reinforces the decision to help the innovator group to analyze it. Nevertheless, the level of success should not be an exclusive criterion.

The initial effort should be to explore the relevance of the innovative experience for other social groups in similar situations. The idea is to observe the innovative experience; mentally exploring how many persons could benefit from the contributions of the experience and based on that potential benefit, to establish the relevance of the experience and of the innovations that it accommodates.

For the purposes of this Guide we are going to assume that the experience has been identified and that the facilitator thinks that it is worth being supported. In those cases it is better to overestimate the potential than to leave out important experiences.

1. The experience

The first thing to be understood is the evolution of the experience, to capture its character, to be aware of its objective, with respect to what is the group’s experience. That is achieved by helping the group to reconstruct its history in the form of a dialog.

1.1. Telling the history of the experience

In this initial phase of the process it is important that the group begins to talk, and keep talking, for being able to remember what has been happening. The best recommendation is to organize it as a dialog in which the participants begin to tell their stories. The intention is to get an initial idea of what the experience was, a first approximation.
The facilitator’s questions are noted, at first to maintain the continuity of the dialog, to help the group remember, to understand those that are vague points and to visualize the various elements, so that the people tell their stories even though others members of the group are not completely in agreement with their versions. The intention in that moment is not to decide what version of the story is most suitable but to enrich the understanding with perceptions from a diversity of perspectives.

In this initial conversation it is possible that differences will be discovered, nevertheless, that is not the purpose compare versions, but to maintain the continuity of the process of reconstruction of the experience. Additionally it is important to discover the diverse circumstances and facets of the experience. The construction of an initial timeline in which the principal events of the experience are organized temporarily may be very useful. The Critical Moments reflection Methodology, developed in CoLab@MIT, can be useful, but there are many options of dialog and semi-structured methods of interview.

1.2. Achievements (LOGROS, in Spanish)

Remembering achievements produces satisfaction and the achievements can be the first clues of possible innovations. In general the achievements are results of the innovations, but it can also be that the innovator groups combine lessons learned and innovations among their main accomplishments.¹

The list of achievements of the innovative experience is a kind of map of what the participants consider most important. Those points can well serve as a starting point to begin the analysis of the experience.
In the case of ESEN, we have a list of achievements that illustrate how the participants remember and value their experience. An initial review allows us to see that there are clear relations among the various achievements.

Accordingly to the participants: The use of technology has resulted in improved learning, it generated greater interest by the students in study materials and a greater level of motivation, which also resulted in improved learning. These elements have generated social recognition and a desire among new teachers to use technology. The way in which the process advanced made the students start to innovate by themselves using technology in order to improve their learning process and didactic materials. In order to start the whole process of using technology and innovation it was necessary to disrupt the pedagogic and technological paradigms of the teachers.

A logical map of the achievements helps in beginning to understand the experience; and the particular way that the participants relate them can give clues in identifying the innovations. That map should be seen as an exploratory tool, a resource for generating questions that help in better understanding the experience. It should not be conclusive since the exploration of the experience is just beginning.

1.3. Characterization of the phases and differences

Knowing the experience in its general characteristics and the achievements most emphasized by the participants, the process of analysis begins, identifying the phases in their evolution and giving them a name and date (year, month and, in some cases, day). The central premise of that step is that the phases of the experiences begin with the execution of some innovation and end in the moments prior to the next innovation.
The idea that underlies that premise, already pointed out earlier, is that the great majority of innovations are responses to emerging problems, that innovations are responses to stimuli and that stimuli, in general, are problems that those involved in the experience had to confront. 2

Once the innovation is incorporated in the experience there will be a qualitative leap, a turning point and a new phase begins. That phase will last until a new transformational innovation is generated. That innovation will produce a new turning point that will carry the experience to another new phase. 3

With the exception of the first phase that begins with actions that began the initiative, the following phase will begin with the incorporation of an innovation; will have a development period, after a time some problem or opportunity will emerge, that stimulus will generate a response (an innovative effort) and the phase will culminate in the moments of incorporation of the innovation that transforms the experience, initiating a new phase in the process. 4

The name of the phase can refer to an activity that created a different characteristic of the phase, to some central participant, some objective or intention that has directed the actions, some incident that marked the experience in that phase, etc.
In summary, it can be any meaningful element that differentiates one phase from the others.

To discover the phases, their names and their dates, matrices can be used, mental maps, rivers of life, or any other cognitive tool that helps participants to visualize the process.

2. The Innovation

Now that we have an idea of the experience and have arranged it in terms of phases and turning points, we begin the effort of identifying the innovations.

We will call innovation a “new way of doing things or a new tool that transforms experience in order to get more and better results with the same resources or to get equal results with fewer resources”.

The steps referring to innovations are done for each phase of the experience. The level of detail of the analysis of each one of the innovations can be very different, and frequently, after analyzing one innovation, it becomes easier to identify others.

2.1. Identification of the innovation, the name and description

Innovation is identified by exploring the causes of the changes in the experiences, the factors that brought the experience to a new phase of development. It isn’t necessary to assume that innovations are necessarily technical elements. The great majority of innovations carried out by social groups don’t refer to new (physical) technologies, but to new ways of doing things or new uses or new combinations of existing technologies. What is innovative is not so much in the objects but in the new ways of using them. It can be new concepts of social technologies.

Once the innovation is identified, it must be given a name. The name ought to refer to the process, object or element that is in the center of the change that occurred in the experience as a result of it. The name ought to help analyze the innovation later and to differentiate it from other innovations that were carried out during the experience.

2.2. Brief description of the innovation

The name is a kind of description, but very brief. The characteristic elements of the innovation ought to be identified and a description done based on them. The description of the innovation helps in understanding its nature and will serve well in the steps following.
Is it a method? Is it a new kind of work or a new process or software? Is it a new tool? Is it a new way of using the tools? Is it a new product or service? Is it a new physical or social technology? Is it a new concept or a new way of using or combining technologies that already exist?

2.3. Identification of actors (preliminary version)

Once the innovation is described the actors that participated in its creation and implementation must be listed. This list will be preliminary and its purpose is to help take the next step of building the process of the innovation. Nevertheless, the facilitator should aim that no one important actor for the innovation process is forgotten.

2.4. Construction of the innovation process. This is a crucial step, as important as the identification of the innovation. This step consists of reconstructing the innovation process, that is to say, how the group managed to develop the innovation, through what activities, with what specific characteristics, in what order, to have a clear idea of how the group was capable of generating that factor of transformation. The understanding of the innovation processes will be key in being able to improve them and in being able to replicate them in the future.

The innovation processes ought to be analyzed from two perspectives, social and cognitive.

- The social perspective refers to the way that persons interact among themselves to advance in the innovation process, to how the advances and failures of some serve as stimuli so that others advance in their innovative ideas, how the exchange of ideas among peers stimulate the creation of new ideas.

- The cognitive perspective refers to how the idea of the innovation keeps developing itself in the framework of old ideas, how some new ideas generate analogies that modify the old concepts and generate space for the development of the innovative idea.

  - With what methods have they been working?
  - What types of information or knowledge have they incorporated?
How have they been constructing or approaching the innovation?
How have I transformed my understanding of the object that I am innovating?
Was the innovation done by a group or by individuals?
What group of actors innovated?
Was there a mechanism for the exchange of ideas?

Examples of dynamics of innovation are: the “skateboard players” in the

Dynamics of Innovation

There are dynamics that stimulate creativity in persons:

a. Jazz musicians sit together and begin to play. The first begins with music that everyone knows. The one who is playing inspires him while he is playing, and begins to develop his own inspiration. The inspiration of that person is contagious to the others and they begin to become more creative, and when this person stops playing the other takes his place and develops his own variations. Immediately a third member enters with his contribution and the creativity of the group begins to manifest itself.

b. Another dynamic of creativity that is used in workshops is brainstorming. In brainstorming, a person throws out an idea on a topic. The others listen to the idea while they are forming their own ideas in their heads. Upon hearing another person’s idea, the listeners end up rounding out their ideas and sharing them with the group. And the emerging ideas inspire and stir up ideas in the others. That way a flow of creativity is generated, that one person cannot achieve alone. It is this stirring up of ideas by other people that disrupts the ideas of each one and allows everyone to shape his ideas in a new way.

c. Albert Einstein, in the years before developing his three works that revolutionized physics, created, with two other friends, a discussion group of scientists and philosophers that they decided to call Olympic Academy. The Olympic Academy was three fellows who liked to talk about books and about the ideas they had about physics, philosophy and math. While talking they were constructing their ideas about others’ ideas. One knew more about philosophy, another knew more of mathematics, and Einstein was the physicist. After talking about his personal experience, Einstein says that being part of this Olympic academy was very important for him; and that in other conversations he managed to organize his ideas better and he found new clues of where to explore and structure his ideas.

If we manage to identify which were the dynamics that allowed the group to develop its innovations it can be important in maintaining the creative capacity of the group. Those dynamics can be reconstructed and nourished when the group needs to confront another challenge that requires its creativity.

California pools, Einstein’s Olympic Academy, the brainstorming of IDEO, etc. Those dynamics always combine moments of interaction and moments of isolation, and it is important to understand how they are combined.  

Some times, the most valuable innovation is not the innovation itself but the process that made it possible. Many times the innovation process has more potential for replication than the innovation itself. The innovation process can be called the meta-innovation.

2.4.1. Activities for understanding the innovative process. Understanding the innovation process begins with the description of the activities, as a reconstruction of how it happened. By attempting to remember all the activities, in what sequence they were done, who did it, and why.
The intention is to achieve the clearest possible idea of how the innovation emerged. An effort must be made to be the most descriptive possible, avoiding theorizing prematurely. Innovative processes are very specific, and some of the most valuable knowledge is in their surprising and particular aspects. The mental posture in this exercise ought to be that of a chronicler who describes an event or a biologist who observes nature and describes what he discovers, it shouldn’t be theoretical but rather pragmatic with theoretical capacity.

2.4.2. Grouping of activities to identify moments

Once the activities of the innovation process have been reconstructed, it is necessary to identify how those activities are grouped in specific moments. The importance of identifying the moments is that it allows better understanding of the innovation process.

As has been indicated before, the participants in the moments of the process may vary. Frequently upon passing from one moment to another some participants change, some come in and others leave. Frequently the roles also change.

The moments of the innovation process can be associated to innovative dynamics like those described in the musicians’ cases, the brainstorming and the creative dialogs. There are a variety of authors who have written about those creative dynamics.\textsuperscript{7}

2.4.3. Graphic representation of the innovative process

Visualization of the innovative process contributes a lot to understanding it. That visualization is done by organizing the moments of the process chronologically. It is highly probable that the process may be cyclical, that is, that the development of the innovation must pass through the same moments more than once; similar to learning cycles, while the innovation goes on being developed, validated and improved.

The identification of the process is a constructive activity but it also can be intuitive. One begins to organize the moments of the process by thinking about the roles of those moments in the process begins to emerge. This makes possible to create an initial mental image of the process. When it occurs, it should be drawn, in a dialog with the group, incorporating the comments in real time and, once there is a first draft, it should be verified with the group if this is the way they perceive the process as a group. It is common that it will be necessary to do more that one version of the graphic representation of the innovative process.

Once the innovative process is represented it becomes much easier to understand its other aspects: actors, roles, sources, and resources.

2.4.4. Roles of the actors by moment
Innovative processes are social activities, combinations of impulses and capabilities of a group of people. The persons involved in the innovative processes perform different roles. The richness that the group may have is in the combination of its differences. The understanding of the different roles placed by different participants is an important aspect of the processes.  

In reality the complement of capacities is a key factor for the viability of the innovations. The lack of some of the capacities is enough for an innovation never happens, or for it happens in a diminished fashion.  

Some people are analytical, others are creative, imaginative, others know how to look for resources, some are very organized and see the logistical aspects, others are better at the cognitive, or at psychological topics, some have practical experience and are pragmatic, others like to theorize, some are enthusiastic other are cautious, etc.  

Which was the combination of capacities that made it possible to advance in each moment of the innovation? The way in which these capacities are combined is expressed in the roles played by the various actors, in each moment of the innovative process. Upon exploring the roles, it must be...
clearly understood that the same person can have different roles in the different moments of the innovative process.

2.4.5. Sources of knowledge and resources

When a group is innovating, it looks over a variety of knowledge sources looking for inspiration, similar experiences, studies, techniques, work tools, resources, etc. That knowledge and those resources end up being fundamental factors for the advancement of the innovative process. To identify which were the knowledge and resources that the innovator group has been using and to discover their roles in the innovative process are necessary elements in a clear understanding of the innovative process.

The knowledge and resources that are used in an innovative process are specific to each moment of the process. It may be that some elements are common to all of the process, but in general they will vary considerably from moment to moment.

Facilitation Suggestions: For each moment of the innovation process, ask the following questions:

- Who was involved in each moment of the process?
- What were the roles of each actor?
- How did the roles of the different actors complement each other?

Note: The same actors can play different roles depending on the moment in the innovation process. The facilitator shouldn’t assume that the role of an actor in one moment in the process would remain constant during the whole process. The facilitator ought to make sure that the participants explain the specific roles of each actor in each moment of the innovation. The facilitator should also help them to understand how the roles of the different actors complement each other.

The roles are key aspects of the innovation process and are in themselves an innovative element since the complement (as well the differentiation) of the roles promotes the development of the capacities of all the actors involved (an innovation may require a diversity of innovative elements).

The analysis of the Process of Innovation can be organized in a Matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moments of the process</th>
<th>Roles of Actors in the process</th>
<th>Sources of Knowledge</th>
<th>Other Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moment 1</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moment 2</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moment 3</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
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<td>Moment...</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moment N</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This matrix can be adapted to the particularities of the innovation process.

3. Impact of the innovation on the experience
The idea of innovations is to solve problems and to advance the experience. Innovations, in general are creative responses to problems that threaten the continuation of an experience. For those reasons it is convenient to identify the impacts that innovations have had on the experience. Those impacts may be short or mid-term, internal or external, positive or negative.

Short-term means, in most cases, a few months to one year at most; and medium term means more than one year and no more than three years. Internal means a group that is taking part in the innovation, to those who are participating directly in the innovative effort. And external means all the other actors, and especially those who are benefiting from or being affected by the innovation, but are not driving it. The innovator group’s composition can be modified over time; some beneficiaries can become part of the innovator nucleus as a result of their contact with the innovations.

The changes generated by the innovations are, generally, positive but can be negative. Therefore the changes must be explored in those two dimensions. It can’t be forgotten that many of today’s problems were created by yesterday’s solutions. Quite a bit of objectivity is required in order to do that exploration and including the negative impacts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of innovation on experience</th>
<th>Short term (up to 1 year)</th>
<th>Mid-term (from 2 to 3 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive:</td>
<td>Positive:</td>
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<td>Negative:</td>
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Changes may refer to a solution to problems, to the change in the vision of the participants, to the establishment of a strategic alliance, to the opening of a new phase in the experience, to the acquisition of knowledge having strategic importance, to the acquisition of more resources, to the projection of a new image, etc.
The identification of the innovation’s impacts (short term) on the experience is a comparison of how the experience was and how it evolved after the innovation. The short-term impacts are mainly changes in the direction of the experience, changes in the direction in the tendencies of the experience. To do that, the facilitator should help the participants to identify the main characteristics of the experience before and after the turning point and to establish the difference.

The midterm and long-term impacts are more difficult to identify, but probably there will be a variety of innovations operating at the same time and it is difficult to isolate the impact of only one of them. One method of estimating the impact may be the identification of the innovation’s role in the experience’s current situation.

3.1. Lessons learned

Once the innovation is identified, the innovative process is characterized, and the changes generated by the innovation are visualized, it is time to extract the lessons learned from the experience. The lessons relate to what is learned in the activity for exploration of the innovations and to the innovative processes and can be expressed in many ways: findings, principles, improvement of the method of analyzing innovations, conceptual map, etc.

4. Diagnostic of the situation

In what situation is the experience currently?

This question has two levels of response: a general one and another one related to the innovations.

4.1. The general response refers to the composition of the group that is involved in the initiative, to their central interests, to their ideas, and to their strengths and weaknesses.

4.2. The specific response refers to the phases in which the main innovations of the innovator group are found. An innovation can be in three phases.

4.2.1. It may be that the innovation is in the middle of an emergent process, that is, the group may be carrying out an innovative activity, and the advancement in that innovation is its main interest. For example, validating a course that has just been designed, testing a new way to distribute a product, trying to overcome a difficulty in an innovation, etc. If the group is in the middle of an innovation process, its requirements for support are going to be in how to advance the innovation that they are carrying out, in the knowledge, conditions and means for keeping innovating.

4.2.2. It may be that the innovative process has basically ended and the group is interested in its implementation, in its use, in resolving practical problems that are impeding taking advantage of it. In that
case the needs of the group will be tied to the practical problems of implementation like: engineering, resources, alliances, etc.

4.2.3. Also it may be that the group’s interest is in operating at a new scale, that it may be to expand the use of their innovation for themselves, or to reach other groups’ objectives, to replicate, disseminate, transfer to other actors, etc. In that case the questions tied to the change of scale as design of the new scale, alliances for growth, resources for investment and operation, etc, are going to have priority.

4.2.4. It is possible that the innovative group is in different phases for each of its particular innovations and its situation is characterized by that combination of phases. In this case, the group’s needs are going to be a combination of elements corresponding to the diverse phases they are in with respect to their innovations.

Given that an innovative group can have many innovations, these analyses should be carried out for the most important, central innovations.

4.3. Actions underway (what they are doing currently)

Once the innovations and the respective phases for each of them have been identified, it is helpful to identify the activities that the group is already working on, both generally and with respect to each of the specific innovations. There is always logic (and assumptions) behind the actions, especially if the innovative group has conceived them. For that reason, it is always good to begin with what the group is already doing. It is likely that the actions currently underway are not the most adequate to move forward and advance, but surely reasons exist for the group to be acting in
the particular manner they do. The first step is to become familiar with the actions underway and understand the reasons behind them: assumptions about the innovation, level of access to resources and knowledge, degree of social connection or isolation of the group, etc. It is also very likely that the ongoing actions are a result of learning from previous actions and from the evaluation of other actions that didn’t work like they’d hoped. In this sense, the actions themselves can contain valuable lessons learned for the group. Within the particularities of the actions, there are beliefs, conceptions, and experiences that are important to recover and modify so that the innovative group can be more effective.

4.4. Planned Actions (what they are thinking of doing next)

The planned actions reflect the way in which the group is thinking about developing its initiative. They are a combination of the strategic vision and actual circumstances and they also contain much knowledge embedded within them. In reality, it is difficult to understand the present state of a group without knowing how the group imagines its future. If this is true for any human group, it is even more true for a group that is carrying out an innovative initiative. The way in which they consider their possibilities strongly influences the actions they are thinking about carrying out in the near future.

Facilitation Guidelines

- The strategic vision is critical for the future of the experience. The facilitator should ensure that it is both challenging and viable. This conversation may one of the richest moments of the entire exchange.
- The facilitator must find a way to build upon the potential of the experience without promoting ideas that are not viable.
- The facilitator must carefully observe whether the participants are expanding their strategic vision or if they are getting lost. At the end of the exercise, they must feel like owners of an ambitious yet viable vision, otherwise the exercise has failed.
- If participants need mental space to move forward, they must be given it. The facilitator should be aware of the mood of the participants. If they’ve lost their connection to the vision. In that situation, the facilitator must return to a point in which the participants felt comfortable with the vision they were constructing.
- This is the most intense of the dynamics up to this point. The others were easier because the people told stories about what they’d done. But now, they must identify where they want to go. This is something new for all of the participants.
- Depending on the energy level of the group, this session could be held after the diagnostic. Participants should be rested and in good spirits to invent their vision for the future.

5. Future ideas (strategic vision)

Carrying out innovations is an activity with a high level of uncertainty, it is an activity that requires much strategic intuition, and it requires a continuous selection of options for action so that they are left with the greatest probability for success. If we consider that many innovative groups operate under major resource restrictions, we can believe that they have an intensive use of their
intelligence in terms of selections to make their innovative drives viable. Nevertheless, it is common that the most visible variables, such as restrictions, will be the resources that become exhausted more quickly, especially work capital, according to the conditions that make it difficult to advance in the actions. These limitations in terms of resources and conditions frequently block the imagination for the development of strategies, blocking the creativity of the group when rethinking their future.

5.1. Strategic Vision (The experience in the future)

One way to clear the mind and create a mental space to reconstruct their strategic possibilities is to imagine what they’d like to do if there were no resource restrictions and they could count on favorable conditions. This skill frees the imagination and allows people to “fly,” that is to say, sustain their imaginative impulses and dream of what they’d like to do if they could, if they had the real opportunity to do it. The liberation of the imagination permits new possibilities to emerge that were previously considered unimaginable and this stimulates strategic creativity.

This exercise involves imagining the future of the experience, fully developed, in a new scale, with new actors incorporated, with impacts that surpass the local level reaching the national or regional one, with social recognition toward the creativity of the innovative group, etc.

This imaginative exercise also allows them to discover what the actors in the experience think are most valuable and the potential of the innovations that they have been working on. Upon thinking about their future, people reinterpret their past and in these moments they can discover interesting things about the experience that haven’t come up before.10

A five-year outlook is a reasonable timeframe to focus on the vision of the future, but all of the elements of the vision do not need the same temporality. It could be that some will be sooner and others a little later.

The facilitator should be attentive to whether the strategic vision captures the most important aspects of the innovation, if it achieves the principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitation Guidelines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The facilitator has to support people in building their strategic vision. This means setting his own vision aside and stimulating (and challenging) the others so that they move forward in expanding their vision, following their own thread of thought.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The facilitator’s role consists of challenging assumptions and beliefs that are limiting the group as they think about their future. The facilitator should also offer elements (mainly information) so that the group can go further than they would without the support of the facilitator.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The facilitator should also ensure the vision’s clarity, consistency, strength and internal coherence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Does it capture the potential of the experience?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Does it transform the people involved?</td>
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<td>• Is the vision clear? Is it coherent?</td>
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capacities and collects the most important aspirations of the innovative group. At the same time, the facilitator needs to determine whether the vision is believable. The vision should not be akin to a science fiction novel. The vision should be bold and ambitious, but possible.

5.2. Strategic Step

All strategy is concentrated on the first step of its implementation, on the movement that changes the current dynamic and reorients the course of the process toward the vision, like the “turn of the wheel” that puts the car facing a new direction.

Having clarity about the strategic step is important in a strategy. If the initial step is basically correct, the actors have got time to continue learning about improving their actions and advancing. If the first step of the strategy is incorrect, the group must rethink everything and redo it as soon as possible.

The first step should be inspired by the vision, but based on how to transform the actual conditions toward the direction of the strategy. In thinking about the strategic step, the intelligence should concentrate on how to transform the present situation to put it on course toward the vision. The strategic step is a very pragmatic decision that is realistic about the abilities of and resources available to the innovative group.

6. Strategic requirements, what kind of support they may be needing

Once the ideas for the future and the basic strategic direction have been developed, it is time to identify what types of support will contribute to the development of the experience.

One way of doing this is identifying the capacities and conditions required to carry out the strategic step and move toward the strategic vision and comparing them to the actual stock of capacities and resources of the group and recognize the differences. This approach is more systematic and provides information about the gaps to be overcome. But it could be difficult for some groups.

Another option, less consistent, but more viable for some groups, is to begin with the kinds of support needs identified by the group (as a result of reflection in the analysis process they've undergone) and verify if the needs they identified are consistent with the strategic step or if they are necessary in order to move toward the group's vision.

The following is a list of the kinds of support an innovative experience might require:

1. How to access new knowledge and resources, potentially with the help of another institution acting as a broker to facilitate access to them
2. How to find allies for their experiences with whom they can exchange experiences, resources and talents, through innovation fairs and gain
institutional support in order to strengthen their image in front of potential allies.

3. Cognitive methods to develop the innovations and systematize the knowledge acquired in them, particularly those innovations that are underway.

4. How to identify, document, reconstruct and analyze the processes and dynamics of innovations as well as strengthening the capacity of group members.

5. How to create networks of people and groups interested in sharing knowledge about innovative experiences and professional development in the field; to be part of a Community of Practice.

6. What institutional conditions will the group need in order to continue developing the innovations in the way they’d like; when they become integrated into larger institutions (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Universities, Public programs, etc.).

The kinds of support an innovative initiative requires can be short term or long term. For the continuity of an experience, it is important to visualize those needs over a long period of time. To identify the kinds of support that can generate immediate change, one should identify the short-term needs.

The short-term support needs can be identified through the actions that group members hope to realize as they pertain to the strategic step, capacity requirements and favorable conditions.

7. Work Plan and Intervention Plan

Once all of these elements are clear, a work plan for the innovative initiative and an intervention plan for the organization supporting it should be developed.
**Additional Guidelines**

**A. General Guidelines (methodological tips)**

1. The way in which someone develops ideas does not necessarily correspond with the actual sequence of events or causal relationships between the ideas (ex: vision and strategies to achieve the vision).
2. Great insights may come up in any moment of the process or in some conversation during the coffee breaks, so it is good to put attention to all conversations.

**B. Guidelines for the facilitator and the documenter**

1. It is needed at least two people to facilitate the method (one Facilitator and one Documenter). If there are three people, one can facilitate, one can document, and the third can synthesize what is going on with the method.
2. The facilitator and documenter need to work closely throughout the workshop (high level of communication and connection).
3. The documenter should be located where the facilitator and the participants can see them so that they can check and verify what is being written.

**C. Guidelines about the workshop participants (who should be participating in the workshop?)**

1. The method should be applied with a group of people that represents the whole process and distinct points of view of those involved in the innovative experience.
2. Different people can participate at different points in the workshop. Participants can vary depending on the different moments within the innovation process. If this is the case, you should work with the group members from each moment in the process to be sure all points of view are incorporated.
Variation on the Method for Identifying Innovations

Prior to developing the method presented in this guide, we utilized a different approach to identify innovations.

The method consisted in identifying the major achievements of the group, exploring the specifics of each and the elements that made them possible.

The exercise took place with a group of women entrepreneurs from San Julian, El Salvador, over the course of a one-hour conversation. By that time, we’d identified their two (or three) primary innovations.

We began by asking the women to list their primary accomplishments and then prioritizing them. (See the box on the left).

They identified a) organizing themselves, and b) relationships with institutions as their most important accomplishments. From there we began discussing those accomplishments in order to better understand what they encompassed and why they were important to the women.

The basic premise guiding the conversation was that the accomplishments were the result of innovations. The exercise was initially centered on finding the innovations that were behind each accomplishment.\textsuperscript{11}

Within a few minutes it became apparent that the candles and shampoos that had seemed to be the primary achievements and innovations were not. But it happens that the women learned how to produce these goods in training activities with other institutions. They made some improvements in the design of the candles, but they were minor changes. This disproved the initial hypothesis of the group, of the knowledge promoter and even of the facilitator.

Once “c,d,e, and f” became clear not to be central elements of the innovations, the facilitator began exploring innovations that could be behind the other accomplishments. The women insisted that “organizing themselves” and “launching their activities” were most important to them, so the facilitator began exploring why these two “accomplishments” had been so important to them.

In the conversation it was revealed that the women lived in an indigenous community in which it is socially unacceptable for women to engage in independent business ventures and the decision to “launch their activities” in the

\begin{center}
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\textbf{Accomplishments:} \\
\hline
a) \textbf{Organizing themselves} \\
b) Launching activities \\
c) Variety of candles \\
d) Candle design and decoration \\
e) Production of candles, shampoos and other products \\
f) Improve presentation \\
g) \textbf{Relationships with institutions}  \\
\hspace{1cm} (secure support from different kinds of institutions) \\
h) Image of women entrepreneurs \\
\hline
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business as an organized group was initially received with much resistance, but with time these actions have changed their lives.

These explanations from the women made it possible to identify that one of the primary innovations had been the creation of a mechanism for group support to break away from the conservative tendencies of their community and change the role of women in their social environment. This group of mutual support allowed them to overcome social pressures against their new roles. The sequence of this discovery was the following: the central accomplishment was having formed a successful group of women entrepreneurs. In order to achieve that, they had to create a means of mutual support for changing the roles of women in a conservative, indigenous society.

There are two interconnected aspects in this innovation: mutual support and change of social roles. There could be multiple interpretations about which of these elements is the principal one. For the purpose of this exercise, it was sufficient to understand that the two were deeply intertwined. One might think that mutual support was the innovation and the change of roles was a result of that mechanism. But one might also argue that the innovation consisted of the change in roles that led to new behaviors and that the mutual support was a mechanism for carrying out the innovation. Lastly, one could say that each element was an innovation by itself and that the women carried out two, highly connected interventions. With the level of information obtained in this exercise, one is not able to distinguish which of these three options is most correct.

The facilitator then engaged the women in conversation to explore the other “accomplishment” they’d prioritized: relationships with institutions. He asked them, “Why did these institutions support you?” In response, the women explained that the institutions supported them because they trusted them. He then asked, “Why do the institutions trust you?” and the women said it was for two reasons: they were entrepreneurs and they kept their accounts clear and their budget organized and problem-free.
Their state of entrepreneurship had already been discussed, so the facilitator began to explore how they had managed their funds and accounts so well. The women explained that they’d created a registry and control system for their resources that was simple, effective and transparent. Because they had that system in place, the institutions that supported them could visit anytime and see how their resources had been utilized and how much was used in each one of the activities. This built trust and with that the group began to secure support from multiple institutions, and with that support they were trained on how to make candles and shampoo. The innovation that permitted them to secure the support of institutions was their model for resource management that was simple, reliable and transparent.

At this point the two central innovations for the group of women entrepreneurs had been identified: mechanisms for mutual support (or changing the role of women) and transparent resource management. These two innovations, carried out almost entirely by the women themselves, had transformed their lives and opened doors to new possibilities that prior to the changes were not available to them.

It’s interesting that in the beginning everyone paid attention to the candles and shampoos due to the tendency to identify innovations in physical technology or in physical objects. Later on it was clear that neither of those were innovations, but rather results of innovations in social technologies conducted by the women. When we thought that the candles and shampoos were the innovations, we asked the women if they were willing to share their knowledge with others and they said no, because it would increase competition toward their products and that was not in their best interests. Nevertheless these same women have no problem with sharing with anyone what they have learned in their two innovations because they were proud of having changed the role of women in their society and would like for other women to do the same. Here there were no barriers to sharing knowledge.

The work of the facilitator consisted primarily in deconstructing the initial responses to help the women’s group arrive at the major changes and the factors that had made them possible.

In spite of the short amount of time (only 3 hours), this exercise demanded a lot of intellectual and emotional effort from the women and an intensive effort on behalf of the facilitator to do “reverse engineering” of the ideas and expressions of the group. This case has provided another example of how innovative groups are unaware of their own innovations they can still identify elements of the innovations as part of their most valued accomplishments. This exercise began with the accomplishments and from there explored the innovations that made them possible. Some of the accomplishments were not related to the innovations at all and others were fundamental elements of the innovations that the group had not identified as such.
Annex: How the Method was developed

This methodology is the result of the experience of the authors but, as a Guide, it was developed during a workshop with participants from three innovative experiences, the facilitator and methodology development team, and a dozen of social-innovation-facilitators-in-training. Through the workshop, the methodology evolved from its initial structure as it incorporated all of the participants' feedback and was adapted by the facilitator.

The method was applied to an innovative experience called “Learning Experiences enriched by Technology” that was carried out by a group of teachers at the Superior School of Economy and Business, ESEN, in El Salvador, and by teachers in two elementary public schools. The two teachers from ESEN who participated in the workshop, especially the leader of the experience (Magdiel Guardado), have withstood a intense stream of questions about their experience and through their increasingly precise answers it was possible to validate the method and at the same time demonstrate it to the other participants.

During the session, the facilitator was responsible for applying the method with the participants and for creating the cognitive tools to make the exercises work adequately. As the method was applied, the facilitator had simultaneously to explain the logic behind his questions and actions to the participants (other facilitators) so that all of them were aware of the method. The reason for this is that the participants in the workshop would eventually act as independent facilitators and had plans to use the method with the groups of innovators with whom they work, placing their understanding of the underlying thought processes at a premium. At the end of each session drawing on the trainees' various perspectives completed an evaluation.

After adjustments made the first day of the workshop, the initial method worked quite well, requiring only some minor alterations. These changes included the development of cognitive tools and questions helping the participants to think about their innovative experience and to make their knowledge explicit. The work to apply and develop the method has been collaborative. Each participant either elected or was randomly assigned to participate from a specific perspective. The various workshop participants have had well defined roles: observation of the method, observation of the facilitator, descriptive documenter, analytical documenter, observation of the documenter, observation of the participants, registry of the questions asked by the facilitator, time control, and logistics support. In some cases there was more than one person playing the same role, so that everyone would have defined roles.

At the end of the workshop a complete review of all the methodology used was done to verify the consistency of the steps, to clarify the method for all the participants and to identify the capability requirements that the facilitators ought to develop in order to apply the method in a flexible and effective manner.
In the two photos we can see two versions of the process of identifying the achievements of the ESEN experience, the first more descriptive (documentation almost literal) and the other at the summary level.

Seldom the stimuli come from perceived opportunities. But there are cases in which people do react to opportunities instead of problems.

It can be that during a phase of the experience more than one innovation occurs, there must be mental space to be able to detect it.

It may be that an innovative experience makes a qualitative leap with the entrance of a new partner, with the incorporation of some important resource. That type of qualitative leap has not been produced by any innovation, it can be very important but, for the purposes of this analysis, its interest is minor.

Innovations can be on physical Technologies, however in most cases it will be about social technologies.

The case of the California skateboard players’ innovation community was cited by Eric Von Hippel in the presentation of his book at MIT “Democratizing Innovation”. The video is available at MIT World, and can be seen free. The case of the Olympic Academy can be found in Wikipedia. The information about the method of brainstorming used by IDEO can be found in the book IDEO of Tom Kelley.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has written excellent books on those subjects.

There are cases where one individual innovates by himself, in an isolate manner, but these cases are exceptions. In general, innovations are social processes, leaded by one individual or a small group of individuals.

In the case of the institutes where the innovations were being carried out the students stated as beneficiary but after a time they incorporate themselves in the group of innovators and did very good contributions to improving the experience.

In the case of elements of the strategic vision and strategic steps developed by ESEN professors, the exercise was carried out in a simplified manner, mainly to validate the method. In a real case, the vision should undergo a clearer and more detailed formulation.

It later became clear that people tend to mix elements of innovations in their accomplishments and this reasoning should be taken into consideration.