Helsinki Design Lab

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SIX STORIES ABOUT THE CRAFT OF STEWARDSHIP

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SITRA

Legible Practises

Six stories about the craft of stewardship

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During Helsinki Design Lab's most recent activities (2008-2013), we have been lucky to participate in a global conversation with communities spanning from design to public service, technology to activism. Although each has its own set of tools and approaches, what struck us was the degree to which similar themes emerged again and again. The words may have been different, but the nature of the challenges and the styles of response were often remarkably comparable. Yet each spoke as though they were working in relative isolation.

Perhaps this should be no surprise, given the challenge of a world where many things seems to be changing, including the ways we live, eat, communicate, and just about everything else. As our needs span the silos of today's society, the boundaries of our disciplines and the relationships between them will inevitably also have to adjust. Some are already doing this proactively; they know that it can be lonely on the edge.

To be an effective practitioner during a moment of flux is to be concerned with the discipline of one's work as part and parcel to achieving better outcomes. The most accomplished practitioners do this naturally, but are often too busy to stand back and reflect publicly on a meta-level, let alone take the time to package and publish their approaches legibly. Sharing tends to focus on the endgame, without much elaboration of how it was played. When we read about promising social innovations in faraway places, we get half the story: sanitised of missteps, triumphant over adversity, effortless.

But hop on a plane and spend a day with one of these practitioners and a different story is revealed, a richer and more informative one. Last summer we had the luxury of doing just that. We listened closely to project teams as they explained their work in detail. We hosted three sessions, each bringing together two cases for a simultaneous discussion, concluding with full notebooks, large audio files, and our heads happily aching.

With this book we have zoomed into the promising practises of six groups to highlight shared tools and approaches, as made legible by concrete examples. In many ways this was a selfish act, one motivated by our own inquisitiveness and interest in learning from the best. More importantly, however, we hope to spark a conversation about the deep craft of social innovation as a reminder that, even when dreaming big, the details still matter.

Buckminster Fuller is pictured here at an event in Helsinki sponsored by Sitra in 1968.

This is not the book to convince you that the world is changing and our systems are currently under stress. The purpose here is to begin codifying the practises of innovators who are consciously rethinking institutions to better meet the challenges of today. We describe this as stewardship: the art of getting things done amidst a complex and dynamic context. Stewardship is a core ability for agents of change when many minds are involved in conceiving a course of action, and many hands in accomplishing it.

The visionary designer Buckminster Fuller had a knack for developing elegant solutions that sidestepped the status quo. He remarked that, "You never change things by fighting the existing reality… Build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." His work was testament to this. Fuller drew novel triangulated dome structures that could cover entire cities, imagined dwellings delivered by helicopter, and invented a new way of mapping the planet. In each of these examples Fuller was free to propose "new models" that were wildly divergent from the "existing reality" because they were innovations that could be developed in isolation, without relying on or interacting with larger systems. He was free to draw and calculate within the clean abstraction of his drafting board, as his innovations were primarily focused on finessing the predictable forces of nature, such as gravity.

But Bucky was lucky. He could work from the outside-in by quietly building new models, testing and developing them, and then introducing the ones that worked as fully formed solutions. Such is the nature of technological innovation. Those of us who focus instead on changes within society do not have the same ability to develop new, parallel realities in isolation. Switching off healthcare or the financial system, while we redesign things from the outside-in, is not an option. As we face systems failure and begin to consciously consider the redesign of core aspects of our shared lives together, we will have to find a way to change existing systems from the inside. Today's social innovators are working on a class of problems where "new models" may be conceived

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of in the abstract, but ultimately must be built amidst and within the old.

The question, then, is how to push existing organizations and institutions to act differently. One option is work top-down by implementing structural changes in a market through new incentives, for instance, or by redrawing the flowchart of roles and responsibilities inside an organization under the assumption that a new chart will produce new outcomes. Top-down change starts with the description of a new model and uses mechanisms of power to compel others to follow along. Bottom-up initiatives lack the ability to mandate change by fiat but thrive on a broad base of diverse contributions. Eventually some attract enough attention to reach a tipping point and, from there, begin to rival old models. The literature on both modes of driving change is extensive, so we do not cover it here. Instead we will focus on an alternative approach: some projects are able to hover in a middle space, pressing 'down' to induce the creation or adoption of new means of directly meeting the challenges at hand, while simultaneously pushing 'upwards' to question the assumptions of today's systems and create space for redesign.

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Starting points

We define projects as initiatives that are specific and concrete in their stated goals, even if their overarching purpose is larger. They are the battle, not the war. Projects are limited in terms of scope, time, and budget, and all of these are typically defined up front. If fixing healthcare is a purposeful change, working with a specific community to redesign care for a specific disease or condition is a project. If addressing climate change is a worthy call to action, building a low carbon community in a particular place is a clearly defined project. The projects we are interested in bracket an area of inquiry, allowing for investigations into specific contexts, barriers, and opportunities, which then inform the development of more generalised, systemic improvements. Here we focus on projects that not only affect the daily lives of citizens, but also suggest changes to the machinery, the culture, and the output of government.

The clarity of mission and objectives that come with a project yields a starting point that is *small enough* to begin almost immediately, yet *big enough* to be meaningful, and move *fast enough* to develop momentum. With enough momentum, a well-designed project will eventually manifest itself as a legitimate alternative arising from within the status quo. Rather than think of scale as the 'roll out' of an idea in incremental steps, we see a class of projects that achieve scale by being self-consciously designed to reproduce themselves. An aspect shared by each of the six stories in this book, and others like them, is that the potential for scale is part of the design, not a phase of implementation.

Startups provide an analogous example. By nature they start small and are intended for aggressive growth; they thrive or perish. As organisations that are judged by their output, most startups are synonymous with their flagship product. And while the things that startups produce are often classified as purely technological innovation, new configurations of software are increasingly "eating the world," chewing up old business models and social configurations in the process.[1] Last year the explosion in demand for offerings from two startups provoked cities across the US to revise their rules and regulations for hotels and taxis, for instance.[2]

Contemporary activism lends another example. Helsinki is the birthplace of a popular quarterly festival by the name of *Ravintolapäivä*, or Restaurant Day. For 24 hours people are encouraged to serve food out of their living rooms, balconies, storefronts, on street corners, and just about anywhere else. On this day, the city's culinary diversity is multiplied many times over with new offerings that are otherwise unavailable, from bacon sandwiches sold out of a basket to Korean duk boki cooked fresh in a busy pedestrian mall. And it's not just the food that's different; people venture into neighbourhoods they might not otherwise visit and the streets of the infamously stoic Helsinki become noticeably more social. When it started, Restaurant Day was technically illegal, yet the popularity of the event has effectively forced the city to revise its extremely strict food safety regulations, perhaps more hastily than they would have liked.

Although there are certainly nits to be picked with these individual cases,[3] their ability to attract customers and participants is testament to the fact that they offer new models to compellingly address the needs of everyday people. That such initiatives are beginning to spark regulatory discussions tells us that these new models are putting pressure on incumbent

[1] **This remark comes from Marc Andreessen, known for his work on Netscape, the early web browser.** > L01 THIS DENOTES A LINK. FOR A FULL LIST OF LINKS, SEE THE IMPRINT AT THE BACK OF THIS BOOK.

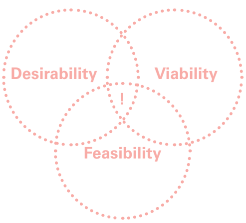
[2] **Airbnb.com and Uber.com are the websites in question, but each have spawned numerous clones, making regulatory discussions all the more inevitable.**

[3] **The technological determinism of Silicon Valley startup culture in particular tends to privlege problems for which technology is an answer. Evgeny Morozov has describes this tendency as "solutionism."** > L02

ones, even if a higher order of change was not their original goal. That is more than can be said for most governmental working groups and the white papers they produce—though we do not mean to imply negligence on behalf of public servants. Rather, a good idea is only part of the answer. The whitepaper as a format is an ineffective medium in a high noise-to-signal context.

When so many things are changing in society, and political cycles tug our attention in various directions, any change must contend with the high level of cognitive overhead that exists in policymaking as much as it does in our media and the market. Because so many voices are competing for our attention, maintaining focus and urgency long enough to achieve meaningful change is a challenge in its own right. The examples above each started with a clear proposition, manifested it in such a way that was compelling to the public, and leveraged public interest to open a discussion about changing the systems of everyday life.

Startups and activists are prototyping the society of the future in a manner that is not only viable and feasible, as evidenced by the growth of their endeavours, but desirable too. Achieving the nexus between viability, feasibility and desirability is something of which projects are uniquely capable. They provide a concrete entry point into a much larger problem, which means progress can be achieved relatively quickly (feasibility), albeit at a small scale. Tackling something concrete makes storytelling easier, which is essential to attract further collaboration, clients, or buy-in (desirability). Furthermore, projects become shared experiences where stakeholders can witness the fullness of a new model, in both rational and emotional ways (viability).



For a more background on this diagram, please see *Change By Design* by Tim Brown, p19.

This study looks at how projects become starting points for larger change but, unlike the examples above, we focus on transformations that begin in or with government. We take a closer look to understand the ways in which careful stewardship of these projects help us step outside the 'rushing current' of the status quo to find better alternatives.

The 99% bridge

Imagine standing on the tarmac of a soaring bridge that spans two sides of a deep river valley. Behind you stretch a couple hundred metres of the most sophisticated civil engineering that humanity can muster. Looking forward you see another few hundred metres of bridge connecting to the other side of the valley as the road curves around a bend and onwards to prosperity. After years of steady work bolting into place the many slender steel beams that hold this bridge aloft, only one issue remains: there is a four metre gap in the middle. All of the promise is there: the bridge signals desire and investment in an alternative future, but at 99% complete it is still 100% useless.

Such is often the fate of grand plans involving the alignment of many individual pieces: the length of time it takes to assemble the necessary buy-in, support and resources leaves large-scale initiatives susceptible to active threats, happenstance and dynamic contexts. While the complexity of the challenges we face might seem to demand large-scale responses, building bridges is a risky venture that puts too much emphasis on the planning phase. In this book, there are six stories about projects that start with a big idea about how the future could be better. In place of building heavy infrastructure, the first thing they do is to string a zipline across the valley so that benefit is paid almost immediately. Those early actions muster the purchase needed to keep the momentum going, while growing in impact.

The six projects we explore in detail are not ones that just might grow to achieve larger effects: they are intentionally designed for it. What makes the stories below so promising is that they are discrete things—urban plans, websites, public services—that offer a grappling point to more abstract issues such as the political, legal, economic and cultural conditions that construct the status quo. These projects act as a lens to help us visualise specific opportunities for change, providing us with a way to see plausible futures more clearly and debate their merits more effectively. They help us see how new means enable radically better ends.

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We begin by exploring how reconstructing an entire town in Chile[4] and rewiring a downtrodden neighbourhood in New York City,[5] show us that addressing a need as essential as housing can constructively provide an entry point to larger debates about equity and opportunity. As we look at building the capacity to innovate, whether within the US federal government[6] or local authorities across the UK[7] we see that this is a form of cultural invention as much as it is a question of developing new skills. Our next examples look at the creation of two websites, one for a very specialised service in Denmark[8] and another for the UK government[9], which show how a far higher level of quality can be achieved without using additional resources, by aligning diverse stakehold-

[4] **Constitución** > P25
[5] **Brownsville Partnership** > P43
[6] **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau** > P77
[7] **Creative Councils** > P59
[8] **GOV.UK** > P113
[9] **Branchekode** > P96

ers around a common improvement effort. These stories show that projects can be a powerful crucible of innovation: they get us from here to there without waiting for a massive bridge to be completed.

Each story is also the tale of escape from a dominant culture (the one that thinks bridges are the only answer). The language, concepts, models, and values that shape the way decisions are made, the world interpreted, risks analysed, and change charted form a culture in their own right—the culture of decision-making. Think of the dominant culture as a powerful stream that sweeps everything down a predetermined course. How easy is it to land somewhere else if caught in the current? Escaping this current is why we build bridges in the first place, but certainly bridges are not the only way to move from one side to the other.

Weather

Farmers can easily stake the boundaries of their property, but know equally well that a successful harvest also depends on forces larger than themselves or their dominion. It depends on a mix of things which are under the farmer's direct control, such as proper fertilisation and pruning, as well as those over which the farmer may have some influence, like pests and commodity prices. Still other factors the farmer has little to no control over whatsoever, weather being the prime example. Stewarding the land can be a hardscrabble life, but there are clear lines drawn between what is within control and what is beyond. When floods come, there's little to do but hope you have prepared as well as possible and wait it out. Some things can be done intentionally; some may only be prepared for.

The challenge of stewardship in the context of social innovation is somewhat larger—it's about changing the 'weather.' The combined weight of laws, vested interests, and "the way we've always done it" can feel permanent, like forces of nature, but these are expressions of a dominant culture. We have to constantly remind ourselves that institutions and the systems they form are the accumulation of human decisions previously made (or abdicated). As such, those same choices can be made differently tomorrow. Or today, for that matter.

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We have not designed hospitals to have long queues, welfare services to disempower individuals, or schools to alienate children. Yet we know that these things are happening, and have happened for some time. Today's problems, to borrow a sentiment from Albert Einstein, will not be solved by the logics of yesterday. So the need for innovation runs at two levels: generating new solutions that improve outcomes quickly, whilst changing our culture of decision-making that can seem as enduring as the 'weather'. Considered separately these imperatives add up to a 'chicken and egg' paradox. However, when addressed together they can form a virtuous cycle of mutual reinforcement.

In this book we look at projects that create a virtuous cycle by swinging back and forth between focusing on visible solutions and on the invisible forces that shape them: the design of a physical space to foster co-creation, a team's daily rituals and their connection to changing perceptions of what public service can be; living in a local community in order to more carefully frame services; discovering the 'a-ha!' moment of tacit knowledge in a public servant's nondescript binder… In each of these cases we see that the outcomes are a mix of new solutions and new cultures.

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The projects here breed cultures of their own, sometimes quite distant from the context from which they have emerged, sometimes again varying only by shades. They benefit from tangible signs of difference that make it simple to understand and communicate how the new thing is different from the old thing. This may sound trivial, but so often change programmes that focus on spreading different ideas fail to recognise that formatting also conveys meaning, sometimes in an even louder voice than the content itself. The story of the GOV.UK website is a good example.[10]

On their way to launching a new single website for the UK government, Government Digital Services (GDS) iterated their product with public alpha and beta launches.[11] They continuously blog about their work and they have risen to prominence as one of the most interesting startups in the UK, attracting the recruits to match.[12] The new GOV.UK website is a visible product that sets a precedent and embodies a powerful alternative to the status quo, changing the standard by which others are judged. Compared to previous attempts to revamp the government's use of technology, the biggest differentiator is actually not the visible solutions that GOV.UK entail: it is the way GDS have changed the 'weather' within government.

Culture is the ultimate engine of scale for any innovation in society. Without changing cultural values and meanings

[10] **GOV.UK** > P113

[11] **Public beta** > P128

[12] **Rebrand public service** > P123

it is difficult if not impossible for new social relationships to propagate or for new approaches to flourish. Since culture is not always a rational or intended construct, change that diverges from a dominant culture is difficult to win through sheer reason alone. To stay with the example of GDS, changing the way government procures technology would be hard to accomplish without also being able to point to a clear alternative. Luckily for the GDS team, before their work began companies such as Amazon.com had transitioned from being perceived as flaky startups to being familiar to even the most technophobic ministers. GDS' precedents emerged within the market, whereas others have to find ways to generate their own evidence.[13]

[13] **Prototype Evidence** > P56

Here the old adage of "show not tell" comes home to roost. When you want to do something very new, 'showing' obliges us to first invent something to show, and invention is inherently risky. As a bracketed endeavour, projects mitigate risk by containing it.[14] And by virtue of being concrete, projects help make change more imminently knowable, which in turn lowers the perceived risk of doing something new at the next larger scale. Abstract notions of possibility, no matter how clever, suffer in comparison to the status quo merely by not existing yet.

[14] **For more on projects in the context of systemic innovation, see *Systems Innovation* by Geoff Mulgan and Charlie Leadbeater p19.** > L03

Strategic Design & Stewardship

We believe that systemic change can be intentionally created—indeed designed—and that the task of linking up the details of a discrete project to the potential for broader change is the work of strategic design. In that sense, strategic design is a means to achieve social innovation, particularly where the class of challenges is complex, systemic in nature, and where the solution will require invention rather than adaptation.

In 2011 we published *In Studio: Recipes for Systemic Change*, which shared a method for identifying the 'architecture of the problem' and developing a portfolio of complementary innovations. Two years on, we have elected to focus on stewardship: once you have a sense of what needs to be done, how do you make it happen? After the idea, what comes next?

At that time, we described stewardship as feedback loops that guide the why, what, how, and who. This books offers a view inside those feedback loops, hopefully making it easier to see the practises that have aided successful individuals and teams. We invoke stewardship in place of words like “implement” and “execute” out of recognition that the latter imply a cleanliness or linear progression which is rarely found when working on a shared proposition in a complex environment. Inside a factory plans can be executed, orders implemented, and outcomes delivered, but innovations that engage with the messy reality of the social sphere do not happen so neatly. What we describe also goes well beyond “facilitation,” which suggests that others do the important work. Stewardship shapes the course of innovation; it is not a neutral role.

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Think of stewardship as a form of leadership. One that acknowledges things will change along the way for better or for worse, therefore demanding agility over adherence to a predetermined plan. Many individuals who work in alliances or collaborative endeavors act as stewards almost naturally. If you are used to continually calibrating the goals of a project with the constraints of your context, you are practicing stewardship. If you maintain a constant state of opportunism and a willingness to pivot when progress on the current path is diminishing, you’re a natural steward.[15]

Of the six cases presented here, all exemplify good stewardship by choosing their priorities carefully and reacting gracefully to unexpected developments, from the initial conceptualisation through the ongoing realisation of the project. Yet only three of the groups involved would call themselves designers. In today’s world there often remains a separation between thinking and doing or analysis and execution. By linking stewardship to design practise we mean to underscore the importance of integrating both into an ongoing process.[16] Much of the work of design happens in the space between the abstract definition of a brief and the concrete demands of outcomes, so it is perhaps natural that those who are used to playing the ‘glue’ would discover a newfound purpose as notions of integration, synthesis, and delivery gain popularity in discussions of governance and business.

[15] **These dynamics have been described in the context of policymaking in *System Stewardship*, a report from the Institute for Government: “Policy… is made and constantly re-made by multiple players interacting in a system.” p7.** > L04

[16] **More on this topic can be found in our previous book, *In Studio: Recipes for System Change*. p40.** > L05

Glue

As strategic designers, we often find ourselves acting as the ‘glue’ that binds together multiple types of expertise, multiple approaches, and multiple forms of value in a team working towards a coherent proposition. Playing the role of glue also entails aligning the details of delivery with a vision. The practises discussed in this book are results-oriented, even to the extent that they may appear to be simplistic or self evi-

Playing the role of the glue also entails aligning the details of delivery with a vision.

dent. On the contrary, we delve into the details because we believe that the qualities of execution are integral to the success of an effort. By taking a close look at material practises we hope to bring a finer grain into the innovation discourse and show that the dichotomy between thinking and doing is a destructive misnomer. Constituents and customers tend to have little time for deep analysis of a proposition, instead they judge the combined results of thinking and doing by the lowest common denominator. If you care about outcomes, the distinction is academic.

Where we find evidence of groups spending time to craft pieces of media[17] or check the minute details of a venue before an event,[18] it is not because the individuals involved are control freaks. They are recognising that all moments of choice between legitimate alternatives have the potential to be strategically relevant, and they project a wealth of alternatives to choose from, rather than leaving the so-called 'little things' to be unilaterally decided by others. This is what it looks like to collapse thinking and doing into continuous parallel activities.

[17] **Audio Interviews** > P109

[18] **Camps** > P68

In situations where no ready template for a solution exists, answers are unlikely to appear just by thinking harder. We have to find a way to move forward and produce useful feedback, which means developing a proposition that can be tested, and that hopefully tests us as well. Projects such as those we study in this book enable their instigators to learn more about how the world works. Until one moves from ideas to actions, it is too easy for theoretical propositions to remain untested and—perhaps even more dangerously—for points of resistance to remain undisclosed. The traditional divide between thinking and doing or planning and implementation makes it too easy for this intelligence and experience to drain out of a project.[19]

[19] **Such a divide also makes it too easy for us to assume that our plans are sufficient. American boxer Mike Tyson has a rather more blunt way of putting this: "everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face."**

The rigours of engaging a dominant culture's resistance (or indifference) to change are instructive as they help us be more specific and more compelling. As soon as one begins trying to effect change, monolithic 'blockages' and 'barriers to change' begin to decompose into more specific (though certainly also more numerous) sources of friction. *Specifically what individual or group is it that thinks a new model is a bad idea? Why do they think that? What do they think is better? What other instances of change have been acceptable to them? What might shift their perceptions?*

Inherited wisdom tells us that the higher the stakes, the more careful we should be. In the past this meant investing upfront time and resources into the analysis and mitigation of risks inherent in a proposal through an extensive planning process. However, when factoring in the rate of change, volatility, and the opportunity cost of not acting, it is now often the case that the "cost of planning," as MIT Media Lab director Joi Ito puts it, is higher than the "cost of trying" and recovering from failure if need be.[20] Ito's observation provides an economic truism that runs through the six cases here and other similar projects. In each, the teams have prototyped their way forward. While the path was rarely direct, this purposeful experimentation resulted in stronger core propositions bolstered by empirical knowledge about what works and what does not. 'Gluing' together the activities of thinking and doing in a prototype allows the vicissitudes of each to inform the other.

[20] From a blog post entitled "Thoughts on Leadership" on Ito's blog. > L06

Vehicles of change

Prototyping implies that making one version of a thing will inform its own subsequent refinement. By introducing the notion of a 'vehicle'—or trojan horse—we are extending the concept of prototyping to suggest that the making of things can also affect the formation and function of the more diffuse layers around it: the cultures, institutions, and systems that shape our world.[21]

[21] Occasionally we use the term 'dark matter' to describe these layers that can seem opaque and inscurtable. For more on dark matter, see *Trojan Horses and Dark Matter* by HDL alumnus Dan Hill. > L07

This idea of prototyping assumes that what we make today does not have to be the limit of what we hope to accomplish tomorrow. When projects become vehicles for change, making a website, creating an eviction prevention service, or designing tsunami protections is never so straightforward. Instead, the website becomes a reflection of intangible changes to an organisation's culture, helping ground and express the latter in the tangibility of the former. Likewise, devising a means of protection from future tsunamis serves as more than a pragmatic solution. It acts as the vehicle through which distantly related grievances are aired on the way to healing longstanding divides within a community. In these examples the material becomes a vehicle for shaping the immaterial.

By shifting the emphasis from *why things are not working right now* towards *how they might work better tomorrow*, one shows a willingness to engage with the constraints of a problem and to take them seriously.[22] Critique alone can be

[22] Richard Sennett's book, *Together,* offers a treatise on the benefits of sharing constraints to move beyond impasses.

threatening and cause people to naturally become defensive even if they are arguing for something they are not responsible for. Projecting a reasonable alternative into the world demonstrates that other options exist, and this makes it easier to accept and engage with the failures of the status quo.

Still, introducing a new set of means within a dominant culture is very difficult. Careful prototyping limits the area of exposure to the project in question, which can help avoid lengthy battles to justify approaches that differ from business as usual. Defending alternative means on their own is often a hard sell, but the tangible promise of new ends (and clever use of analogous examples like GDS' use of Amazon.com) helps create the mental space needed to entertain the possibility of a different way of achieving impact. In that sense, projects can be thought of as a way to disrupt habitual patterns of behaviour without disrupting an entire organisation or system just yet.

We do not have enough data at this time to offer guidance on exactly what makes a good vehicle, but we feel it important to recognise that an emerging class of projects achieve impact by exhibiting dual timelines, multiple ambitions, and by beginning with a proposal rather than a diagnosis. Using a project as a vehicle for change will never turn a complex challenge into a simple one, but projects can act as a simplifier.

As evidenced by the skill of the teams whose work is discussed here, using a project as a vehicle for systemic change is not an easy task. But when it does work this approach elegantly breaks the deadlock of the 'chicken and egg' paradox. Conceptualising a project as a trojan horse implies that the question of scale cannot be delayed until later phases of development. Instead the potential for growth must be nested within a project from the start and form an integral aspect of decision-making at all stages. Trojan horses recognize that scale is not a phase, but a quality of the architecture of solutions.

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Legible practise

If there are certain tools, means, and mindsets that lead to more effective outcomes, how can we help their adoption become as frictionless as possible, so that they spread as widely as possible?

Best practises are one way, but we find they too easily paper over the nuances of context and the complexities of culture in the interest of codification. What works in one cultural context may not work in another, and when best practises are conveyed without the background, their adaptability is stunted. What happens when unexpected situations arise? In an effort to better understand how people do what they do and further propagate effective approaches, we introduce the idea of a "legible practise."

Legibility is an investment in the self-learning potential of the community at large.

Legibility implies exposing the seams: not only what happened, but how and why. The impulse towards legibility drives us (and hopefully you) to take the extra steps necessary to share and make explicit the tacit assumptions that underpin projects. By going beyond openness to proactively name and share our practises, legibility is an investment in the self-learning potential of the community at large. It is an invitation for others to disagree with us and to spark an informed discussion, or to ask for more of the same if it's something they like.

During the interviews that preceded this book, Russell Davies of Government Digital Services described the importance of making ones' work legible to others:

> "…Naming things is going to be really useful because, if [the project] goes well, the department will say 'oh we did an X with GDS and it went really well …' or we can say, 'yes, we've got a process for X.'"

Legible practise helps more people benefit from the same X by making it easier for others to read your work, especially for those who come from different perspectives or backgrounds.

Six stories

As management consultants scour 'governance ecosystems' looking for bottlenecks that can be 'benchmarked' and business processes to be 'reengineered', we look to discrete projects that help us create a bounded space within which to study cultures of decision-making. Without being able to question the dominant culture and create space for innovation to flourish, people and organizations will invariably revert to habitual logics, further reinforcing the status quo. Projects generate specific moments of friction to be resolved, and this helps us more effectively identify solutions that can be grown for use at a larger scale or translated into a different context. Doing so shows more specifically how institutions might be pushed and pulled to act differently, not by side-stepping them, but by rewiring them from the inside and inventing new cultures of decision-making in the process.

With gracious participation by the Brownsville Partnership, Community Solutions, Elemental, Government Digital Services, IDEO, Innovation Unit, MindLab, Nesta, and Tironi Asociados we studied six examples[23] of successful stewardship: creating neutral ground for new ideas; disrupting expectations; and creating a sense of urgency; as well as addressing the need to create evidence, awareness and approvals necessary for change to happen.

[23] **For more on our selection criteria, please see the appendix** > P131

We have adopted a consistent format for each case beginning with a description, in our own words, of the goal of the project; the implicit theory of change; and a list of success factors and strokes of luck. By this last item we mean to indicate the things that would be difficult for others to replicate, such as contextual aspects, turns of fate, or relationships that far exceed the timeline of the project in question. Next, we briefly tell the story of the project at a high level, describing what happened, who was involved, and how the work unfolded. At the end of each case, we zoom into a handful of practises and tools that contributed to the project's success.

While we have attempted to be rigorous in understanding the projects we studied, we have resisted the urge to formulate a model of innovation. We consider the practises identified here to be useful in myriad circumstances, but recognize that our selections do not constitute an exhaustive list. Although we describe each practise using one case as an example, most of them should resonate across the other cases as well.

These six cases are multidisciplinary efforts, each benefiting from the involvement of a range of professionals with diverse skill sets but also different terminologies. We nonetheless describe the cases in a single language to highlight an emerging community of practise. We hope to supplement, not supplant, the threads of ongoing discourse that are relevant to the cases. In work like this, the pace of discovery today is such that traditional modes of knowledge capture are lagging, be it peer reviewed articles or the development of theoretical frameworks. The purpose of this book is to describe what's working on the ground today, and we leave it to others to position these observations within existing and future domains of knowledge.

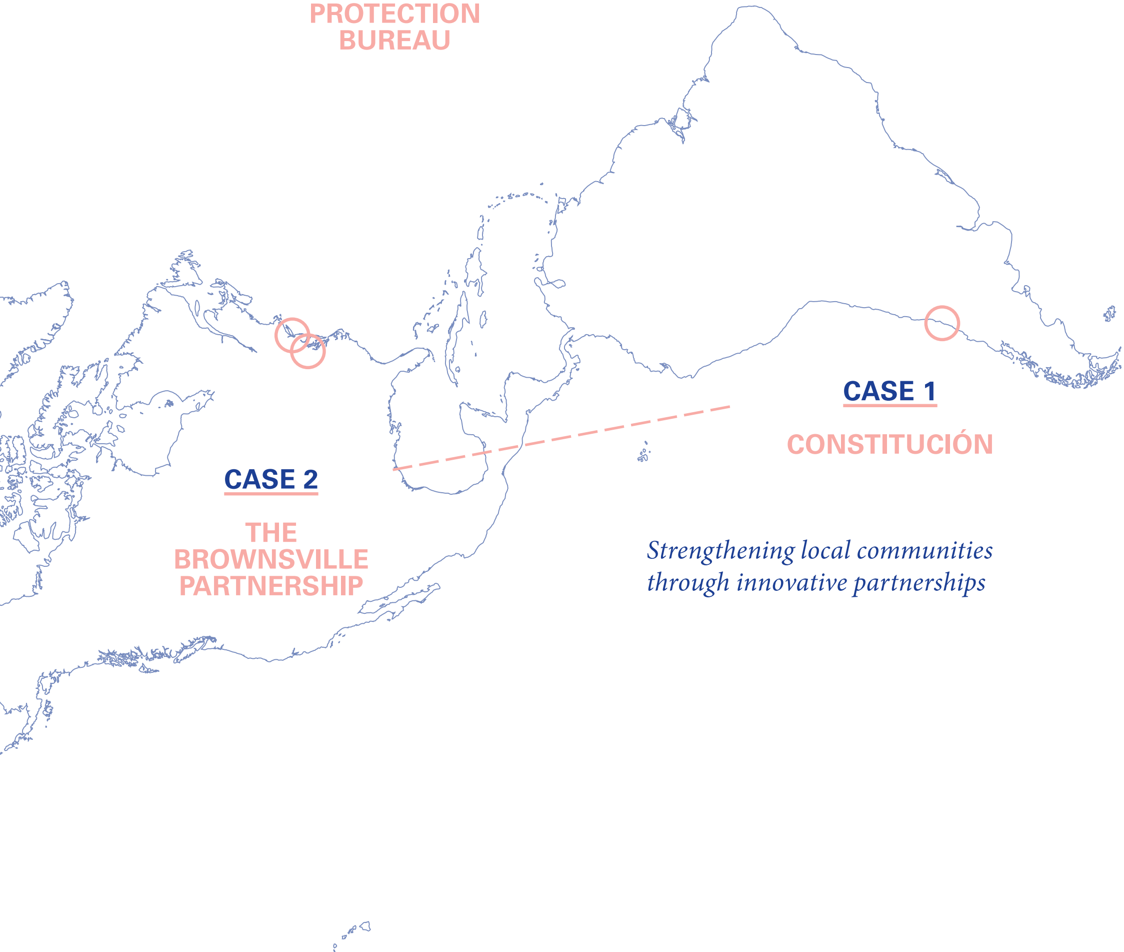
By now our motives are hopefully transparent, even legible. While we certainly hope that this book will be a resource for those who are interested in sponsoring or commissioning social innovation, we have written it first and foremost with practitioners in mind. This is an empirical study based on some of the most inspiring projects today, led by groups whose approaches are as innovative as their results. It is a book about the practises that steward new ideas into action.

Achieving far higher quality in public services by adopting innovative means

Building new innovation capacity within the heart of government through coaching and co-creation

CASE 4

CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU



Strengthening local communities through innovative partnerships

Strengthening local communities

Case 1
Rebuilding Constitución

"Such vast projects must, in the end,
have a simple start."

Alejandro Aravena

Project goal

Redesign the city in 90 days through a co-creation process aimed at delivering more resilient infrastructure and an urban form that provides greater social equity.

Theory of change

By working on an extremely limited timeline, business as usual could be suspended to make a new design process possible. This would invite stakeholders from the community, industry, and government into the same decision-making process, balancing biases against each other to develop a coherent proposal that seeks to generate new value for the town.

Success factors and strokes of luck

The Minister of Housing was familiar with the work of Elemental, a key player, and knew their foregoing projects in detail; The Minister of Energy was appointed to chair the public private partnership (PPP), helping to ensure funding and political stability when the government changed; and, although not enviable, the scale of destruction created an opportunity to radically rethink planning practises.

On 27 February 2010, the sixth largest earthquake ever recorded occurred off the coast of central Chile. Three minutes of violent shaking triggered a tsunami ravaged coastal cities. Among those hardest hit was Constitución where a fifteen-metre wave washed away 50 per cent of the town centre, killing several hundred people. Surviving residents experienced near total collapse of infrastructure and services.

Like many mill towns, Constitución was dominated by its largest employer, a pulp and paper mill. Its construction decades prior was rapid, and intended to meet the immediate needs of a growing industry and a population seeking work. As a result, Constitución was not built with Chile's seismic threats in mind, and few amenities were available to citizens. The mill had a dual role in the lives of the town's citizens: derided for its impact on the environment and the foul odours it produced, but appreciated for the economic security it provided. As many residents uncomfortably acknowledged, without the mill there would be no town.

In their unpredictability, earthquakes are never convenient. Chile's earthquake happened just two weeks before the new national government assumed office—a period of transition and uncertainty. In Constitución, the tsunami nearly destroyed the local government's ability to provide services, leaving citizens and businesses exposed. The scale of damage and diversity of need made a coordinated response nearly impossible. A master plan was needed to guide rebuilding, yet the community could not sit idle waiting for the typical mechanisms of town planning to run their course, which could take years. The need for reconstruction was pressing, and growing more so on a daily basis.

From the perspective of the citizen, the challenge was to meet basic needs. From the perspective of local leaders, the challenge was to manage the immediate funding and reconstruction of nearly everything in the town.

For the urban planning community, the solution was straightforward: move the town away from the coast to an open, inexpensive area where redevelopment could proceed unfettered by land rights, damaged infrastructure and the imperfections of a haphazardly built town. Relocating the city would also concentrate reconstruction funding in the hands of a few key players. While government did not prefer this from a fairness perspective, the degree to which it simplified the process was attractive. Under this business-as-usual approach, procurement and accountability would be streamlined in a recovery package bounded by the edges of a new, *tabula rasa* city.

Arauco, owner of Constitución's mill, would be a natural partner for reconstruction. Their commercial interest in the town's restoration was obvious, but they also had the ability to deploy resources quickly. Most importantly, Arauco possessed deep knowledge of the region and its people.

Chile's Minister of Housing at the time was a cofounder and alumni of Elemental, a Chilean architecture and design firm that had developed an innovative approach to social housing used in many parts of Chile during the previous decade. He asked Elemental to help by leading a 'support team' to plan the reconstruction programme. They integrated with other partners to provide the expertise needed for a project of this scale and complexity: Arup (engineering), Tironi (strategic communications), Fundación Chile (national innovation institution), Marketek (strategic planning for tourism), Universidad de Talca (the principal regional university).

"We had 90 days to plan a city. A short time for a planner, but an eternity for a citizen."
Alejandro Aravena

The competing demands of recovery and planning lead the team to invent an artificial timeline.[1] To optimise productivity and minimise suffering of citizens, a plan deadline was set at 90 days.

[1] Artificial Timeline > P37

The first challenge was to 'design the client,'[2] which was identified as an oversight board formed as a public-private-partnership (PPP). The exercise defined who the stakeholders were and how lines of authority flowed. At first blush, the municipality should have been the obvious answer, but the scale of the reconstruction put this effort beyond their sole control. The team concluded that the client—those who would ultimately take responsibility for reconstruction—was a PPP binding together the Municipality of Constitución, Arauco, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. Seeing sufficient diversity of interests in the PPP, the national government ceded direct decision-making control over the project indicating an important success for the team. Their focus could then turn toward the community.

[2] Design your client > P40

The team understood the reconstruction of Constitución to be a critical opportunity to make sustainable gains for the community.[3] Their work in social housing had proved that if government benefits are deployed strategically, in a way that enables at-risk communities to participate in decision-making and access opportunity, then the funding could do more than just alleviate a housing crisis. It could act as an investment, creating long-term wealth for families. Elemental's challenge was to frame this opportunity in the context of a

[3] Create upside > P34

disaster. As they did in social housing, Elemental began with the real "owners" of the crisis: the community.

With the clock ticking, the team spent two weeks "absorbing" information about the town, its people, its economy, and its stakeholders, as well as the physics of tsunamis. While a typical process would start with a formal diagnosis of the problem based on this information, the team skipped that stage and instead reacted to it with an idea, folding their insights directly into a proposal.[4]

[4] **Lead with a proposal** > P35

Simultaneously, the team built a simple community centre in the main square for public forums. New construction signalled that work was finally beginning on the reconstruction. Its position in the centre of town, and its public function telegraphed the desire of the PPP and support team to include citizens in the effort through a participatory process. It also gave the support team a visible local presence from where they could work.[5]

[5] **Go local** > P55

"In the community, the silo systems are reflected. So, in the forums, you have to convince them that their interests are aligned."
Rodrigro Araya

The first forum held in the centre was critical to building public trust in the team and approach. Big questions would need to be addressed upfront, namely would the mill stay in the centre of town as it rebuilds, or would the mill be relocated to reduce its odour and other annoyances?

In the forum, the approach was one of openness, with the team self-consciously hosting a discussion of the issues in common sense terms so that residents would not feel excluded by expert terminology. The support team and Arauco opened discussion by directly addressing an unspoken grudge within the community: the difficult relationship between the community and the mill. The town's future and the success of the mill were intertwined: Arauco could relocate, however the town's survival would then be unlikely without its main source of economic activity. By posing this question with a genuine openness on Arauco's behalf to stay or go, some power was vested in the community, which helped create a foundation of trust. Together citizens decided that their interests would be better served by retaining the mill in-situ. The honesty of this early meeting engendered further participation.

Subsequent community meetings, called *hybrid forums*,[6] were carefully planned and executed in a way that gave citizens the same authority as the designers, engineers and government officials. The working theorem of the hybrid forum was that participation was effective only when multiple stakeholders were engaged simultaneously and equitably in debate about the town's future. In practise, this meant that

[6] **Hybrid forum** > P39

the forum would coordinate the stakeholders, the issue at hand and multiple levels of authority. The participation of a group this diverse had the effect of making everyone more comfortable with the decisions that were finally reached.

Bilateral meetings were held in different areas of town before each hybrid forum. This helped identify key participants for the upcoming forum and built buzz around them, effectively making the hybrid forums the place to be seen and be active. Twelve community needs were identified and 25 projects were developed (addressing topics such as housing, energy supply, a new bus terminal, the town gateway) through nine hybrid forums. The focus was on responding to the crisis but these forums also helped the community articulate its collective identity, which fed into the plans as well. The importance of the waterfront came to the forefront.

By starting with a proposal and embedding the community in an iterative design process, the team was able to present a vetted proposal at day 60, leaving 30 precious days to adjust the plan. Three options were presented to the community and authorities by the support team:

Plan A

Rebuild nothing. This came with the caveat that in Chile, you cannot guarantee that abandoned areas will not be reoccupied, even illegally. Reconstruction would happen but history implied that it would be haphazard, possibly creating conditions much worse than before.

Plan B

Build a heavy tsunami mitigation wall and reconstruct the town. Some authorities and business leaders preferred this plan as it activated procurement through large contracts. But it would isolate the town from the waterfront, worsen annual flooding and its performance was called into question after Fukushima in 2011.

Plan C

Capitalise on Arauco's expertise: build a forest one city block deep to dissipate the force of any future tsunamis. About 100 families (a mix of fishermen and wealthier landowners) would have to be displaced. Expropriation of families would involve significant government hurdles.

Plan C was the most ambitious but also the most unconventional strategy. It sought to address the necessary tasks of reconstruction while also striving to create the potential for upside by addressing issues that had lingered in the town's collective conscience for years. Above and beyond rebuilding, the plan had four objectives: improve public infrastructure;

manage floods; improve public space; return democratic access to the waterfront.

> “At the beginning, there was a lot of NIMBYism.* But now, there is YIMBYism and the fishermen are the project’s biggest supporters.”
> *Rodrigro Araya*

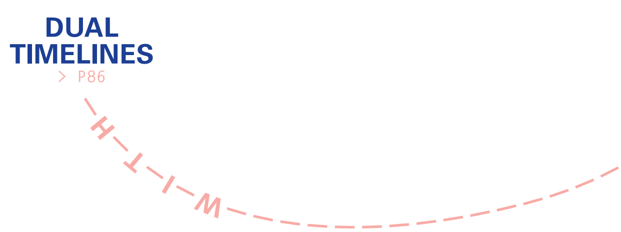
Before the tsunami, Constitución had a “deficit” of public space, providing less than a third of the space per citizen that could be found on average across the country. Access to the town’s waterfront was also constrained by the presence of the mill and a handful of wealthy landowners. The support team argued that a tsunami wall would only increase these deficits whereas building the protective forest would more than double public space and restore a sense of equity at the water’s edge.

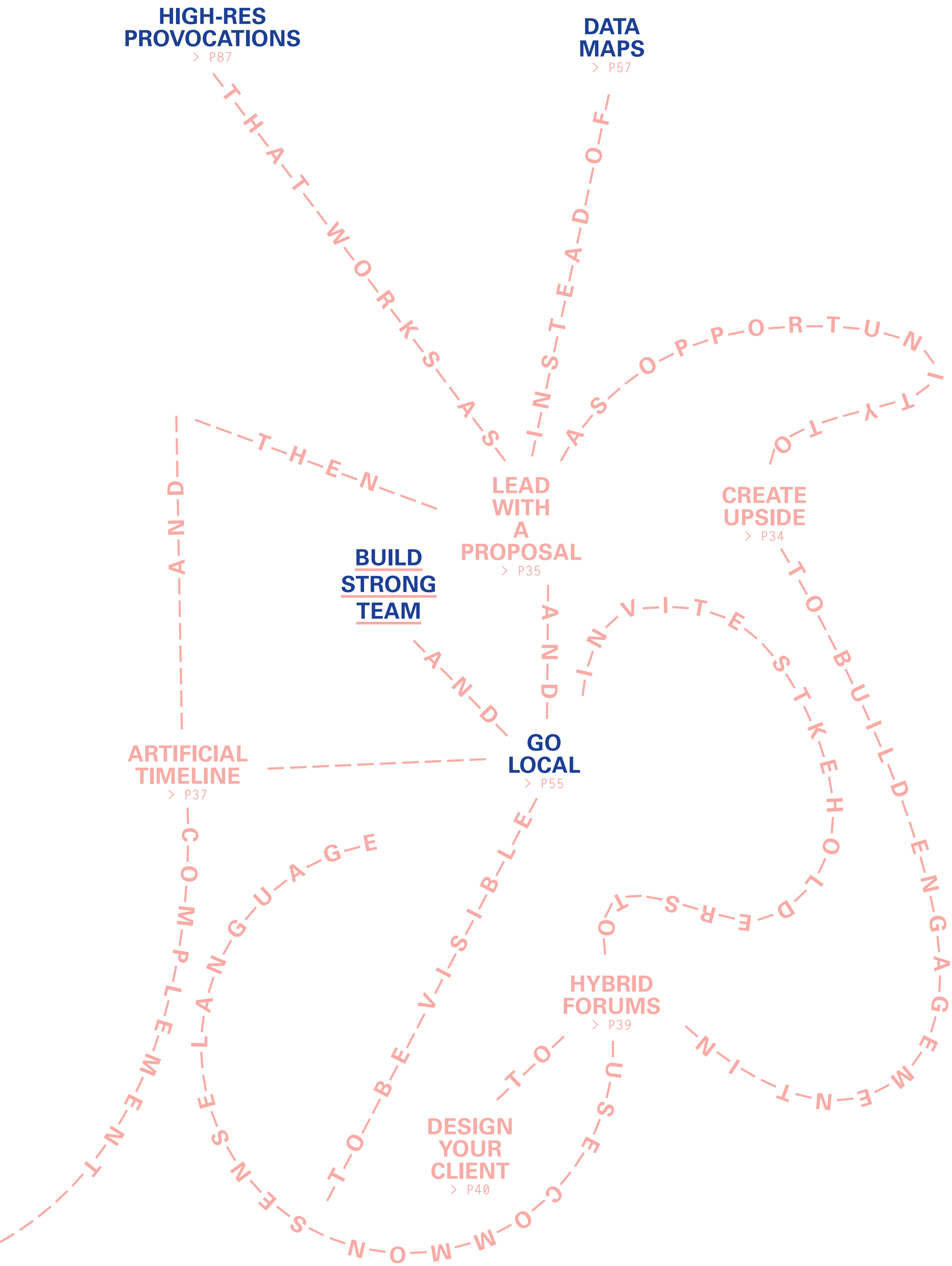
These objectives would be difficult to account for, especially when basic shelter was the priority. To overcome this accounting asymmetry, the support team performed a careful analysis demonstrating that Plan C would create more economic value than what was lost in the tsunami, but at a cost lower than Plan B. By public referendum, 94% of the town voted for Plan C. The team’s economic argument would later help the municipal project become part of the national budget, and in 2012, the government began acquiring land for the plan.

Critical to the project’s future is the fact that the citizens of Constitución are its most vocal advocates. Public participation transformed the public into owners of the project. The citizens will ensure the reconstruction plan survives political cycles and budget challenges that weaken so many large-scale efforts.

* **NIMBY refers to Not In My BackYard. YIMBY, likewise, refers to a more welcoming statement of “yes in my backyard.”**

This diagram is an interpretation of the case studies as a network of mutually reinforcing practises.




HIGH-RES PROVOCATIONS
> P87
DATA MAPS
> P57
THAT WORKS AS
INSTEAD OF
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> P35
CREATE UPSIDE
> P34
BUILD STRONG TEAM
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INVITE STAKEHOLDERS TO
TO BUILD ENGAGEMENT IN
GO LOCAL
> P55
ARTIFICIAL TIMELINE
> P37
COMPLEMENT
LANGUAGE
TO BE VISIBLE
HYBRID FORUMS
> P39
TO
USE COMMON SENSE
DESIGN YOUR CLIENT
> P40

Create upside

Never waste a crisis. Getting back to normal is important, but moments of upheaval also open the possibility of setting goals for improvement that go further to create new positive value.

The aftermath of a crisis is usually a period of intense activity focused on returning an affected area or population to normal. "Normal" is the plea of citizens and promise of politicians. In the case of a destroyed city, normal means rebuilding the systems, services and buildings to a state that roughly replicates the pre-calamity functionality, perhaps slightly modernised.

Elemental's innovation in social housing was to understand government funds not as an entitlement, but an investment that could create a future upside for families. For Constitución, the team foregrounded an evolution of the same idea: redevelopment was not just about rebuilding, but was an chance to produce gains for the community. Neglect and short sighted investment had created a 'debt' owed to the citizens in the form of a poorly built city. The Support Team designed a plan that built opportunity back into the city's fabric.

By developing a plan that would meet immediate needs while also produce gains for citizens, the team was able to enter into a broader political discourse about social equity, rather than a more localised debate about how best to rebuild. This netted two benefits:

First, it improved public and political acceptance of the plan. The team placed citizens squarely at the centre of their process. A project built around creating equity provided citizens the opportunity to think and act on their future, not just restore the past. This turned citizens into owners and advocates and helped insulate the plan from pressure to reduce its scope.

Second, it provided access to a larger investment pool. Engaging a national discourse created a bridge between the plan and political priorities. Not only did this generate awareness, but also pushed the municipal project into the national budget, a highly unusual occurrence.

Lead with a proposal

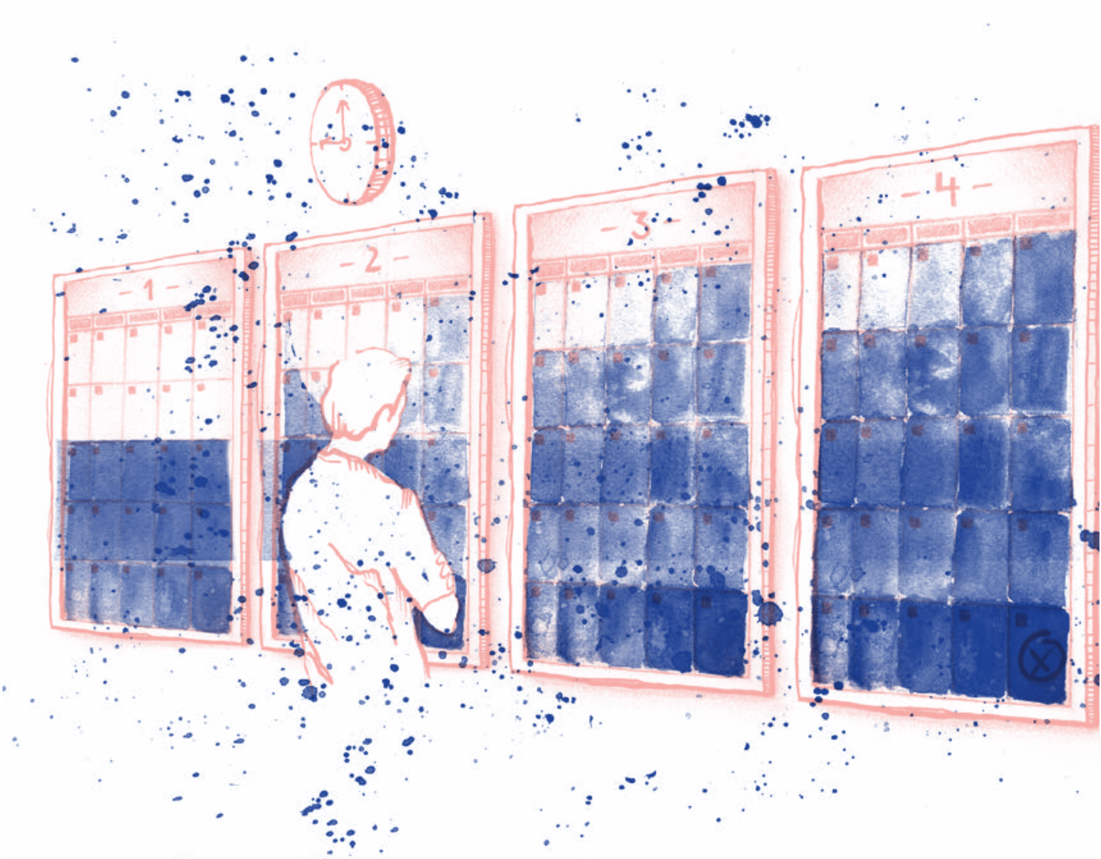
It can take an eternity for all of the facts to be collected, so getting started with an early proposal, and revising it often, puts the emphasis on solving problems rather than finding truth (which may never come).

The support team began sketching solutions after only two weeks of information "swallowing." The focus of the team's efforts was to produce solutions, allowing them to make a first proposal for a conceptual design for the city two months after beginning work. The team never completed a full analysis of the mechanism of destruction, but a rough understanding of what happened and how to mitigate a future event's worst effects was integrated into the proposal. Most importantly, the team did not limit their analysis to tsunami-related damage. Broader pathologies ("deficits" as the team labelled them) resulting from poor planning and little on-going infrastructure investment were also analysed and folded into a proposal that would utilise reconstruction to build lasting gains for citizens.

For the professional planning community, this approach seemed to yield a proposal untethered from the due diligence that must accompany all good plans. The support team understood that this would open up the proposal to criticism that could stall their efforts. So rather than incorporating deep analysis on the front end, they subjected their proposal to a comprehensive accounting on the back end to better understand its social, environmental and, most importantly, (for the purposes of political legitimacy) economic value.

The net result was that the team could speak with sufficient authority on the mechanism of destruction and broader social challenges, and then speak in great detail about how their proposal added value. They became not experts in tsunami disasters, but in how to rebuild after them.

By avoiding the "eternal diagnosis," the support team was able to encourage experts and politicians to work reflexively. Rather than breaking down the ideas of citizens, stakeholders and designers into separate analytical silos, the team was free to find ways to calibrate the input of the community to the political and economic reality of reconstruction, and the goal of producing gains. This transformed individuals with authority from defenders of a sanctioned motive or perspective, into collaborators that might "push back, but not block" the project.



1
2
3
4

Artificial timeline

Committing to deliver outcomes in a short window of time can put positive pressure on a collaborative effort.

Recognising the urgency of need, the support team proposed a 90-day time limit for delivery of the reconstruction plan to the client partnership—similar projects normally take up to two years. Given the complexity of developing a conceptual design for the whole city (including public buildings, housing, infrastructure, public space, etc.) an expedited schedule was highly unusual. But the team felt that 90 days balanced urgency with capability and would provide the best opportunity to propose a comprehensive solution before traditional crisis mitigation efforts took over.

The schedule was further compressed by the decision to publicly present the conceptual design on day 60, leaving 30 days for reflection and refinement.

Urgency was forced due to the unfolding crisis, but it was also an artificial constraint that provided the support team tactical advantages. First, the team tabled a proposal before the business-as-usual reconstruction machinery could make an intervention in the name of tsunami protection that could harm the city's vitality. Second, it charged the participatory process and led to intensive collaboration, becoming 'the thing to do' in town that would not likely be the same on a longer timeline. Third, the team was forced to move quickly between understanding the context and prototyping solutions. By moving quickly into a proposal, the support team was able to preserve the potency of the project's guiding principles.

Hybrid forums

A carefully facilitated public debate designed to balance the motives, capabilities and authority of experts, politicians, business leaders and citizens.

Hybrid forums originate in an academic study of the future and the limits of delegative democracy,[7] but were pushed directly into service by the support team to enable a multilateral approach to planning the city.

Hybrid Forums were held as open public events, but were coordinated to engage stakeholders around certain objectives. For instance, if the future of the river was being discussed, citizens that owned land along the river and river-oriented organisations would be specifically invited along with a cohort of experts and politicians. To prepare for the forums, bilateral meetings were held in advance to spur interest and awareness. As the team held more forums, some voices began to dominate, so the format was changed to allow opportunity for everyone to share their perspective.

The hybrid forum was the key instrument for levelling authority in a potentially volatile environment. It deliberately unsettled the role of experts, politicians and business leaders, but in a collaborative space where reconstruction and its potential collateral benefits were foregrounded. This enabled a constructive public debate "from fisherman to the President" about what was needed and what was possible.

The success of the forums hinged on meticulous preparation, careful facilitation and according to the team, total intellectual honesty with citizen-participants. Difficult, complex issues were discussed in common sense terms by the team because experience showed that the public was highly sensitive and quick to make a judgment about the forum's credibility.

Simplicity was also important: "The complexity of the problem does not need you to build additional complexity on top of it. Explaining the problem in simple terms is already complex enough."

[7] ***Acting in an Uncertain World*** **by Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes & Yannick Barthe.**

Design your client

Actively become involved in sorting out who is ultimately impacted by a project and who has authority over a body of work.

In a catastrophes, such as that experienced by Constitución where information is limited and crises, both immediate and long-term are overlapping, the question of authority is fundamental to making a calibrated proposal. In a crisis that garners national attention, authority becomes multidimensional with proximate authority exercised at the municipal level and ultimate authority at the national government. The support team's challenge in Constitución was to determine not only who had authority, but also who should have authority.

In sitting down to design the client, which ended up being a PPP, the support team recognised presumed sources of authority. They also identified possible stakeholders that were in a position to supplement the government's natural limitations to improve the odds that long-term gains would be made for citizens.

To rebuild Constitución, this meant forming a public private partnership with the largest local business in a move that was met with scepticism and unease by citizens. This partnership in effect formed a team of rivals. It was thus the support team's responsibility to navigate their competing interests and, through vigorous public participation, ensure that the public interest was being preserved.

Strengthening local communities

Case 2
The Brownsville Partnership

"We knew there had to be a learning and trust building phase before we could set our long-term course, and we committed to a period of uncertainty as we became immersed in the community. That turned out to be 18 months."

Rosanne Haggerty

Project goal

Create a safer, stronger and more self-reliant community in Brownsville by working collaboratively with community, non-profit organisations, and public agencies to build a portfolio of complimentary services.

Theory of change

By focusing on a bounded area and serving a significant percentage of high need families within a tight geographic radius, The Brownsville Partnership (BP) aims to effect significant change at both the household and community level. Beginning with the highest-need families, BP would provide highly-tailored assistance by building a coalition among multiple organisations, acting as the local interface to the neighbourhood. This comprehensive network of programmes for neighbourhood residents produce a cumulative impact that is greater than the sum of its parts. Brownsville is a logical starting point because it is an extreme example of a high-needs neighbourhood in the context of the US. The hypothesis is that what works here also stands a good chance to work elsewhere.

Success factors and strokes of luck

The core approach had been thoroughly tested by Rosanne Haggerty and her team at a smaller scale; Haggerty herself is a widely recognised, extensively-networked leader in this sector; The team was able to identify a local champion, who enhanced the project's local legitimacy.

By the time the Brownsville Partnership (BP) began in 2008, the initiatives of Rosanne Haggerty and her team at Common Ground had already assisted upwards of 19,000 homeless and nearly homeless individuals secure safe and stable housing. Common Ground began with individuals in the immediate neighbourhood of their offices: the ones they were able to get to know best through daily contact. This experience allowed Haggerty to identify housing as perhaps the key determinant in the lives of people on the margins of society in the US. Previously employment, freedom from substance abuse, and physical and mental health were thought to be pre-requisites for housing, but Haggerty flipped this assumption on its head.

The work of Common Ground proved that when housing comes first, clear improvements in other areas of the lives of individuals follow more rapidly and at lower cost. In Brownsville, Community Solutions, a national spinoff of Common Ground, has adapted this approach to address homelessness at the point of most significant impact: before it even happens. The opportunity to extend their focus from individuals to whole families came when Community Solutions received a grant from the Robin Hood Foundation, a prominent funder in New York City. The question was: where to focus first?

They turned to spatialised data—statistics applied to a map—and began looking for coincidences.[1] This helped them identify Brownsville, a neighborhood in New York's borough of Brooklyn, as a community with "a perfect storm of indicators" in Haggerty's words: "It's a seedbed of the problems that lead to homelessness" such as evictions, incarceration, child welfare involvement, chronic health problems, and poverty. It is among the city's most troubled neighborhoods, and exactly the kind of place that Community Solutions thought they could make a difference.

Community Solutions likes to start with the cases that occupy the extreme end of the Bell curve: the five per cent which are in regular crisis, experiencing the most frequent involvement with costly government systems including homeless shelters, child welfare and criminal justice. This stems from their earlier work on individual homelessness, where they found that the most vulnerable people often get stuck in the system. Haggerty notes that "the system is designed for individuals to pass through, but sometimes people get stuck, 'churning' through one acute interaction after another, racking up high costs and accumulating

[1] **Data map** > P57

1 in 5 residents between ages 16 and 25 is not in school and not working.

—

The median annual household income is $26,000 (less than EUR 20,000).

—

The foreclosure rate is nearly 3x that of Brooklyn on the whole.

—

29 percent of residents were stopped by police in 2011.

Source: Brownsville Partnership > L08

animosity as they go." The 'five per cent' are the familiar faces that police as well as social workers and other caregivers see again and again, which can lead to feelings of hopelessness for both the recipients and the givers of care. Conversely, genuine improvements in these most dug-in cases can accumulate quickly to create a powerful tipping point. This itself generates new energy leading to a virtuous circle of change, unlocking the will and attention to address the next five per cent and so on.[2]

[2] Work at the Extremes > P53

With a history of blight and poor leadership, Brownsville had become hardened and somewhat inured to the difficulties it faced. "The community has forgotten that there is a crisis, because the conditions are so entrenched," spanning multiple generations, according to Haggerty. The community has an immense amount of pride and can be suspicious of outsiders. To become accepted, Community Solutions knew they would have to play a long game when establishing their presence in the neighbourhood. This translated into a strategy of being committed to being on the ground for a period of no less than 24 months.[3]

[3] Go Local > P55

Early on, Haggerty met Greg Jackson, a local resident who had grown up in Brownsville, played professional basketball, eventually returned, and had assumed an active role within the community. Jackson became the first executive director of the Brownsville Partnership and his credibility and stature in the neighbourhood were strong indicators to the community that the new effort could be trusted, opening many doors. Jackson's role in the community was so strong that Rasmia Kirmani-Frye, Director of BP, recounts people in the community calling BP the "oh right you work with Greg" group. Community Solutions also established a local office for the Brownsville Partnership so that the project would be physically rooted in the community, an important symbolic act to which previous NGOs had not committed. This made it easier for them to co-host regular meetings in community members' homes to discuss their hopes for Brownsville's future. Through this consultation with community members, BP was able to collaborate with the community on launching needed programmes and events.

As much as Community Solutions embedded themselves into the neighbourhood, they also made room for members of the community to become part of the Brownsville Partnership. Creating a number of Community Planning Partner positions helped the Partnership understand local needs on a deeper level while further rooting them in the fabric of the place and its people.

Alongside a broad community organising effort, the first service developed by the Brownsville Partnership focused on eviction prevention. Although it took a while to gain the trust of both sides, eventually BP was able to play a mediating role between the families and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the largest landlord in the neighbourhood. By intervening before matters escalated to formal eviction, Community Solutions have been able to negotiate payment plans and agreements that allow the families to stay put, which in turn saves money for NYCHA and prevents a cascade of negative impacts to the family. Since 2008, BP has assisted more than 500 families with housing crises and prevented 350 evictions, which has saved the public coffers $12 million (over €9 million) that would otherwise have gone to expenditure on emergency shelters.[4]

[4] **Source: Community Solutions**

With limited resources the team adopted a prototyping approach almost by default, planning and delivering offerings on an ongoing basis with feedback and tweaks at regular intervals. Ideas for new services, partnerships, and programmes are tested at a small scale first and grown when successful. The Partnership itself evolved out of a preliminary service called Homelink that Community Solutions began testing in Brownsville in 2005. When it first started, the Homelink eviction prevention service was delivered by a single individual. As the efficacy of the approach was proved and demand grew from 2005 to 2009, Community Solutions were able to allocate more hours, and eventually increased staffing to more than four full-time positions. By testing the validity of their assumptions at a small scale, BP were able to get started quickly, producing evidence of success—which would be helpful when looking for funding to expand—as well as learnings that helped improve the service. [5]

[5] **Prototype Evidence** > P56

Brownsville Partnership's name is no accident. Brownsville was a "desert of services" that had a reputation for being an especially tough place to achieve positive results. This made some groups nervous to invest their efforts for fear of failure, but as a small organisation BP could not do everything themselves. Instead, they provide the local intelligence that outsiders need to stand a better chance of succeeding. Corinne LeTourneau, Director of Special Projects, describes BP's role as "taking on the risk of vulnerability" when they partner up. After the successes of Homelink, BP began building a portfolio of collaborations in Brownsville by acting as the local partner who could help other social purpose organisations gain traction in the neighborhood.

In concrete terms this means they help other organisations understand the local conditions and community, define relevant programming, write grant applications, and occasionally co-sign the applications. With a spirit of pragmatic engagement LeTourneau sees value in discussions with groups that show interest in Brownsville, even if the value proposition is not immediately clear. “Working with partners is an investment in our future.” As much as possible, partnerships are executed in close cooperation at both a strategic and operational level. This allows BP to more effectively steward initiatives toward success by working with their collaborators to align objectives and means.

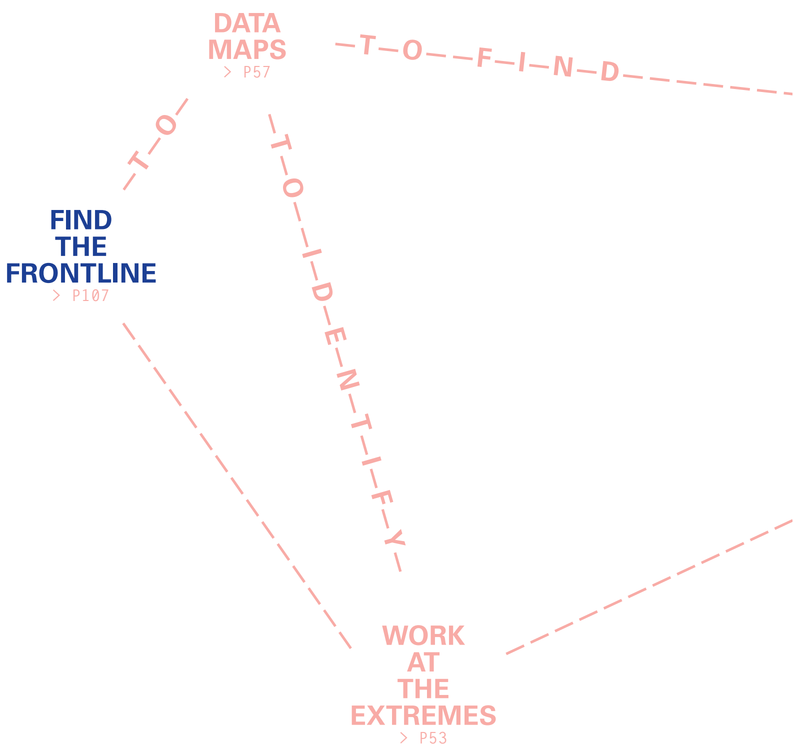
“The partnership’s role is to take on the risk of vulnerability when working with partners.” *Corinne LeTourneau*

BP’s portfolio of activities includes: Home To Stay, which seeks to reduce recidivism; a Youth Market that creates jobs and increases the availability of healthy food; Spaces for Healthy Community, which promotes an active lifestyle and revitalises the common outdoor spaces; and long-term redevelopment possibilities for a cluster of high density housing at the centre of the neighbourhood. As the portfolio continues to grow, BP are responding to the ‘perfect storm’ of negative symptoms by using a saturation approach. Their goal is to build up enough density of services that synergies are created within the neighbourhood.

The Partnership maintains strategic planning as an ongoing activity while simultaneously seeking opportunities on the ground. This helps strategic projects land at the right point in time. By regularly revisiting their big picture view of the neighbourhood and the possibilities for its future, BP prime themselves to see potential partnerships in an opportunistic light, aligning them with the Partnership’s long-term strategy and the full portfolio of initiatives in play.

In 2012 the Brownsville Partnership and the community was shaken by bad news: Greg Jackson had passed away unexpectedly. Although this was a shock to the team and all involved, BP have honoured Jackson’s legacy by continuing the work that he deeply cared about, in the neighbourhood that he loved. That BP has continued to develop effective programmes without Jackson at the helm is a testament to the success of their patient relationship building which has gained BP the trust of the community.

Currently the Partnership is focused on three main priorities; improving the economic and social mobility of Brownsville families, reducing violent crime, and making visible improvements to the neighborhood. BP continues to work closely with its partners to ensure that all programming supports these objectives. A new walking trail and a collaboration with the city government aimed at bringing bike lanes to Brownsville are two examples of ongoing initiatives conceived as visible symbols of transformation. Simultaneously, BP is working with the Center for Court Innovation, the District Attorney, and the local law enforcement community to develop a peer-to-peer forum that hopes to link up individuals recently released from prison with those who are most at risk of going to prison. In efforts such as this BP stay true to their roots by acting as the local partner, framing opportunities that would otherwise be difficult for outsiders to identify and working with collaborators to tune services for maximum effect.



NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT

> P72

LOCAL CHAMPION/ ADVOCATE

HELPS BUILD TRUST

IS A FORM OF

FOCUS AND TO

GOING LOCAL

> P55

AND GIVE IT ENOUGH TIME AND

AND

PROTOTYPE EVIDENCE

> P56

PATIENCE

SCALE UP SUCCESSES

Work at the extremes

Focus on the extreme ends of the Bell curve where the signal to noise ratio is highest.

The Pareto principle (or 80/20 rule) tells us that a "vital few" causes are responsible for a disproportionate amount of effects. In looking at medical costs for stroke care, for instance, treatment of a small number of individuals (20 per cent) can often account for the vast majority of accumulated costs (80 per cent).

Those at the very ends of the Bell curve often experience the same drivers as people across the whole of the curve, but in an amplified way. This is a useful rule of thumb when conducting fact finding and ethnography work at the beginning of a project. In these cases, rather than taking an even sample across a population, seek out a selection of the extreme high performers and low performers who represent 'boundary conditions.' If stroke is the condition in question, that would imply getting to know the individuals who have had the most complicated experiences with the condition, as well as spending time with some who are exceedingly healthy and perhaps especially concerned about the possibility of stroke. Focusing on the extremes helps avoid the "sea of sameness" so that issues are brought into high relief, making it easier to derive useful design insights from them.

The same approach can be helpful when choosing the right place to start an intervention. When taking on a complex, interdependent problem, you may struggle to find a starting point. Looking at every member of a population—all homeless individuals, for instance, or every resident of Brownsville—makes it difficult to know where to begin. A useful way to focus is to look for the most costly cases, which therefore stand to generate significant savings or returns from the very beginning.

In Common Ground's work with homeless individuals, they discovered that a small number of people were the ones who used up a disproportionate amount of resources. By focusing narrowly on figuring out how to help the five per cent most chronically homeless, they were able to finitely bound the much larger problem of homelessness and create "an imaginable tipping point" according to Haggerty. Narrowing in on the five per cent gave Common Ground a clarified, more extreme starting point. Furthermore, solutions that worked for this population would naturally have to be robust, lending themselves more readily to adaptation for use elsewhere. It is harder to find effective scalable solutions by working the other way, starting from average situations and adapting "upwards" into more complex ones."

Go local

Commit to being part of the community that you are working with and give yourself a realistic amount of time to become trusted.

It is hard to innovate remotely, so the point here is basic but absolutely crucial: a deep familiarity with the culture, context and conditions within which one seeks to work is essential. In the case of Brownsville, the community is a neighbourhood with geographical boundaries. However, "going local" is important regardless of whether you're working in a physical place, a professional community or industry. Each has their its own specific culture, networks and shared history.

Immersion into a unique culture accelerates the process of gaining credibility within a new community and thus generates its own value. For instance, the local office space that Community Solutions found in Brownsville was not the best for their needs, but it was worth more for them be located in Brownsville than it was to have the perfect office environment in an adjacent neighbourhood. Being present is a sign of commitment that has paid them dividends.

When working in a community, context, or role where one is unknown, there may be no choice but to play the long game with patience and persistence. During the Brownsville Partnership's early work on eviction prevention, team members had to slowly build a relationship with the building managers who were initially reticent to get involved.

The Homelink eviction prevention team started by sending letters to the management offices, but they went unanswered. Next they tried cold-call visits to the office, which garnered an equally cold response but did lead to a scheduled meeting further on. This snowballed into weekly drop-ins, during which time Rasmia Kirmani-Frye and her team could regularly pitch their services and slowly get to know the managers. Today the Brownsville Partnership hosts a monthly meeting with managers from each of the New York City Housing Authority's local buildings to discuss their mission collectively.

Kirmani-Frye's experience shows us that patience can be as frustrating as it is virtuous. Patient innovation implies an acceptance that what fails ten times may work on the eleventh. One must be careful to manage expectations about the pace of progress and find ways to keep the motivation up even when positive feedback is scarce.

Prototype evidence

Conduct small experiments to test hypotheses. Document the outcomes to help refine learnings and generate evidence to attract further funding or authorisation.

When doing something truly new, sometimes the only way to produce evidence that it will work is to test it out empirically. Experiments allow for important feedback loops within a project while simultaneously acting as powerful storytelling devices to build future constituencies, be they funders, partners, or participants. Concrete outcomes, well documented, are key to de-risking the next larger scale of development.

The Brownsville Partnership did this by investing $5,000 (EUR 3,800) into a farmers' market experiment, which led to a successful, documented series of subsequent markets. They collected quantitative data on attendance and sales as well as qualitative comments from community members. The Partnership's careful data collection established a useful "trail of truth" that validated their work at one scale and helped the Partnership show how it could grow over time. The same pitch, without any evidence, might otherwise be perceived as too risky by external funders.

Although significant to the organisation, $5,000 was a safe amount for the Partnership to risk in a calculated bet. Based on a hunch that markets could work in the neighbourhood, they decided to test it out. To mitigate the risk, the Brownsville Partnership worked with GrowNYC, a local non-profit that had already demonstrated a successful model in other neighbourhoods. Partnering reduced the number of variables to manage and allowed them to focus on their core skills: adapting efforts to local context and conditions. Other risks included the prevalence of street violence in the neighbourhood, which the Partnership addressed by locating the market in a very public space.

In the end, the Partnership's bet paid off. Their $5000 unlocked more than $1.1 million (over EUR 840,000) in funding over five years from the New York State Health Department, allowing them to expand the team and continue the green market.

Data maps

Locate data geographically to get a sense of how statistics match up with the real world.

Statistics help us understand symptoms, but by nature they are a limited way of looking at the world. Moving from analysis to action requires being specific about where to start, what to do, and how exactly to respond to the symptoms one is trying to address. Visualising data on a map can help answer these questions by tying statistics to real-world places. Good data maps help balance the clean nature of statistical data with the realities of our messy world.

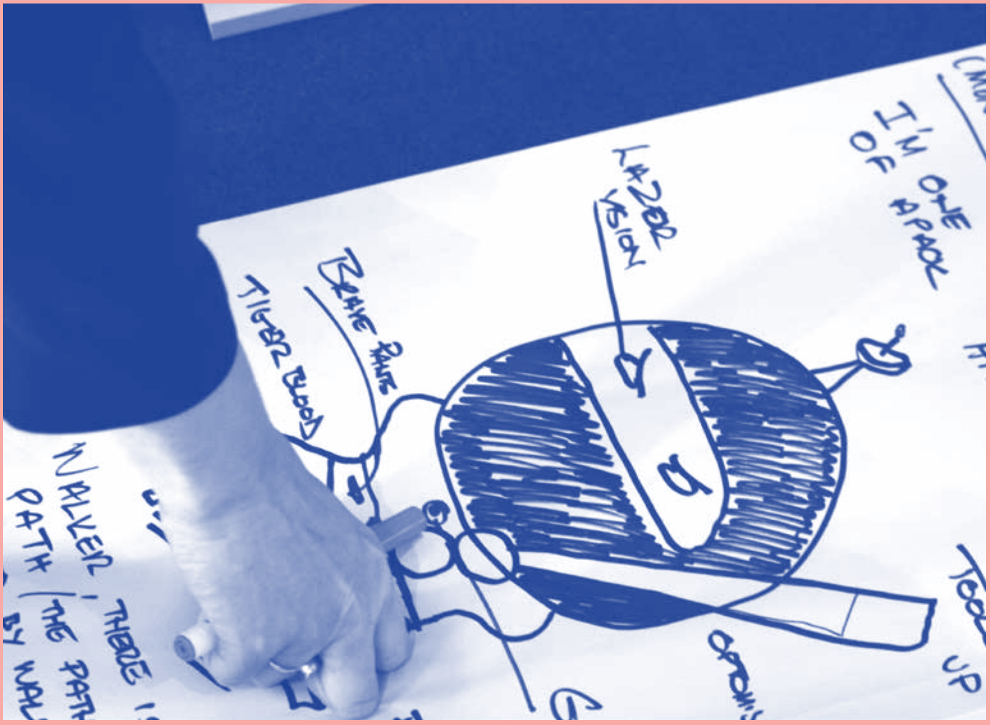
When beginning their work in Brownsville, Community Solutions worked with Laura Kurgan, Associate Professor of Architecture at Columbia University and director of the Spatial Information Design Lab, and Eric Cadora, director of the Justice Mapping Center. Kurgan and Cadora were developing maps of New York City that plotted the scale of incarceration expenditure on a block-by-block basis.

Community Solutions noticed that the central blocks of Brownsville were a clear hotspot, confirming a tacit assumption that was lingering in the circles of community development organisations within the city. Everyone knew that Brownsville was a troubled neighbourhood, but seeing the maps helped establish a sense of scale, which in turn made it easier to identify more specific targets for development. The team began to have a better sense of how much ground they would have to cover to make a difference.

This data became the first among multiple layers of maps that Community Solutions used to identify Brownsville as a uniquely complicated context. Ultimately, it led to the team committing to spend more time in Brownsville to gain a better understanding and make a final decision about whether this was the right place to work or not.

Building new innovation capacity

Case 3
Creative Councils



"Creativity as a concept was generally regarded as 'bad in good years.'"

Philip Colligan

Project goal

Support innovators in local government across England and Wales to develop and implement radical innovations addressing a long-term challenge that matters in their area.

Theory of change

Nesta believed that local authorities could become more innovative by identifying the right internal teams, building networks of like-minded innovators across councils, and providing both financial and nonfinancial support.

Success factors and strokes of luck

Financial pressures within local councils encouraged them to find significant efficiencies in their services; Nesta had tested a similar approach on a previous project; As an innovation fund, Nesta was able to finance the project itself.

Amidst a record deficit of £90 billion in 2009, the possibility of budget cuts loomed in the UK. It seemed inevitable that something would have to change in the way public services were delivered to citizens. Nesta, a charity[1] whose mission was to boost innovation throughout the UK, was concerned that the clamour for quick action to reduce the deficit would lead to a focus on efficiency through cost cutting,[2] an approach that would yield at best "same for less" quality of services if not "less for less".[3] With the severity of the global financial crisis making it obvious that the economy would not rebound quickly, Nesta attempted to make the most of the urgency that the crisis brought to the issue of revamping public services. While the self evident option was to reduce costs as its own endgame, Nesta sought instead to improve quality while also achieving the necessary savings. With a specific interest in assisting local authorities, Nesta partnered with the Local Government Association to develop a programme called Creative Councils, which sought to empower local government to develop innovative new ways to meet their own challenges.

[1] During the course of the work described here Nesta's status changed from being a quasi-non-governmental organisation to being an independent charitable foundation as of April 1, 2012.

[2] This approach was advocated by McKinsey via their report ***Delivering public sector efficiencies*** published in April 2009. > L09

[3] The wording here is borrowed from Nesta's publication ***Radical Efficiency***. > L10

The 'genome' of this thinking was synthesised into a model of "radical efficiency," described in an eponymous report[4] commissioned from Innovation Unit, a non-profit social enterprise that focuses on public services. Testing the report's recommendation to bring pioneering localities together to form "radical efficiency zones," Nesta worked with Innovation Unit to develop a project called Transforming Early Years (TEY), which eventually became the predecessor to Creative Councils. TEY worked with six localities to change the way they delivered services for families with young children aged 2-5. Among the success stories was that of the Chellow neighbourhood in Bradford which created a community fellowship programme enlisting community members to assist vulnerable families. The "Chellowships" reduced costs by 38 per cent while more than tripling the reach to help an additional 385 families take advantage of the services available to them.[5] TEY's success was critical in building confidence that the radical efficiency model could work.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See Nesta's publication, ***Transforming Early Years: Four visual Case Studies*** > L11

If all localities in the UK were able to achieve the same kinds of turnarounds in their services, a truly radical change would be effected across the nation, and with that in mind Nesta and the Local Government Association launched Creative Councils. Whereas TEY focused on improving the outcomes directly for end users, Creative Councils is primarily concerned with supporting innovators inside local government who in turn have their own targets for improved outcomes on the ground. It is a long-term investment into boosting the capability of local authorities.

Four assumptions sit at the core of Creative Councils:

1. Incremental change is not enough
2. Local government is part of the solution
3. Solutions must be replicable to have impact
4. It is possible to codify innovation methods.

Starting at the local level would put real, measurable impact closer within reach in the near term. Meanwhile, persistent attention to codification of methods and a concern for replicability kept the effort focused on innovations that could be translated to other contexts after proved in one locality, thus preparing the good ideas, once identified, to scale. Among the winning proposals were projects such as a local energy brokerage, a new economic model for social care, and a redesigned service portfolio for children in care.

Part of the challenge was to repair the perceptions of innovation itself, which had become overhyped in the minds of some as lacking real rigour, too attached to post-it notes and bean bag chairs. "Creativity as a concept was generally regarded as 'bad in good years'," reflects Philip Colligan, Executive Director at Nesta. To make the possibility of creativity and innovation in public services less abstract and easier to engage as a positive pursuit, the programme was organised around real challenges that local innovators themselves identified as critical issues with long-term importance. Nesta organised the programme into three phases: an open call for applications, a series of camps to develop capability within the teams and refine proposals, and the implementation phase where councils delivered their proposed projects.

Out of the UK's 373 councils, 137 applied and 17 were shortlisted based on the quality of their ideas. This was then further winnowed to the final selection of 6 teams. Nesta took an empathic point of view towards the councils' time, recognising that the day-to-day obligations within a local authority were already demanding. This translated into an intention to make sure that each phase of the Creative Councils process would be a valuable experience in itself, even if the team was not selected to move on to the next round. Realising this intention began with the design of the open call competition.

The competition mandated that each council submit no more than one idea. It proved difficult for some councils to negotiate internally as they selected a single proposal to put forward. Yet to deliver an innovative project in such a harsh climate would require alignment around clear goals, so the stipulation that councils select a single proposal effectively helped kickstart the alignment process before applications were even submitted. The open call encouraged partnerships between authorities and NGOs, which also produced positive side effects, including the formation of new networks as teams jointly explored the possibility of entering together.

An analysis of all applications published on Nesta's website allowed the teams, regardless of whether they were selected, to benefit from a broader understanding of the critical issues across the UK at that moment. Committing to conduct the selection process in public in this way also subtly ratcheted up the seriousness of competition as applicants would have to publicly own the quality of their submissions and risk being shown up by their peers.

While the shortlisted teams were still in the running, they received financial and non-financial support. Creative Councils offered to all 17 shortlisted teams a grant of up to £30,000, as well as non-financial support including a dedicated coach and access to assistance with services such as ethnography and horizon scanning.[6] The balance between financial and nonfinancial support helped communicate that, as important as it is to have some extra cash, the ability to create and communicate clarity is equally vital to the success of an inventive initiative.

[6] **Non-financial support** > P72

Individual coaches from Innovation Unit were assigned to each of the selected councils. They met regularly with the teams to guide them through the innovation process, acting as 'sparring partners' to test ideas. The coaches gently pushed teams outside of their traditional patterns of behaviour, instead nudging them towards new inroads to better solutions. This regular contact also helped the Creative Councils team keep a real-time sense of how the participating councils were advancing and what aspects of the programme might need more emphasis.[7]

[7] **Project blogging** > P75

Councils were responsible for iterating their proposals on their own time, as well as collectively participating in a series of five 'camps' lasting up to a couple days each.[8] These sessions were located in a physically removed setting which helped establish an air of difference allowing people to step outside of their normal habits. The camps were designed to

[8] **Innovation camps** > P68

accomplish multiple goals: to bring teams and their leadership together, validating the innovative spirit; to raise the ambition level of the proposals; and to help public sector employees articulate and analyse their ideas more sharply. This occurred through a range of activities including "elevator pitches", social events, and focused analytical planning sessions with coaches. Throughout there was an emphasis on converting tacit assumptions into explicit plans by repeatedly testing expressions of the proposals through verbal presentation,[9] diagramming, and writing with feedback offered by peers and coaches. "We use a vetting process that mimics the real world that the innovators will eventually encounter," says John Craig of Innovation Unit, "can you talk about your idea without people laughing at you?"

It was not always easy to get public servants to critique their peers' and their own ideas. Some participants had a tendency to look at issues through a moral lens, making it hard to separate means from ends, and therefore difficult to productively critique.[10] *How could you criticise something intended to help those in need?* While this clearly showed that many were motivated by the mission, it "[prohibited] engagement with the realities of delivery," according to Craig, and clouded their ability to find new means. After all, constructive criticism is a learned skill—one that can be strengthened, which was a significant aspect of the camps.

While Creative Councils was designed to help local authorities develop agility and innovation in their own thinking and doing, Nesta found themselves also adapting to emergent opportunities as the programme has progressed. For instance, at first Nesta was undecided about how to identify the best councils to work with and how to leverage collective learnings. Philip Colligan recounts assuming that proposals would cluster thematically, which would foster peer learning between councils addressing the same themes: "our beautiful model… was beautifully flawed. Ideas were all over the place and councils were not always willing to share experiences." Rather than select proposals based on a priori themes or clustering, which was clearly not going to work, Nesta pivoted[11] to a different selection criteria. The end goal remained constant, but switching criteria enabled Nesta to continue towards the same goals without threatening the momentum of the project. Instead of clusters, they followed the emergent interests of the councils, selecting projects based on the quality of the idea, regardless of how it related to other proposals.

[9] **Pitching** > P71

[10] **Common to the design professions, the term refers to discussion generated by outside experts that aims further refine a proposal.**

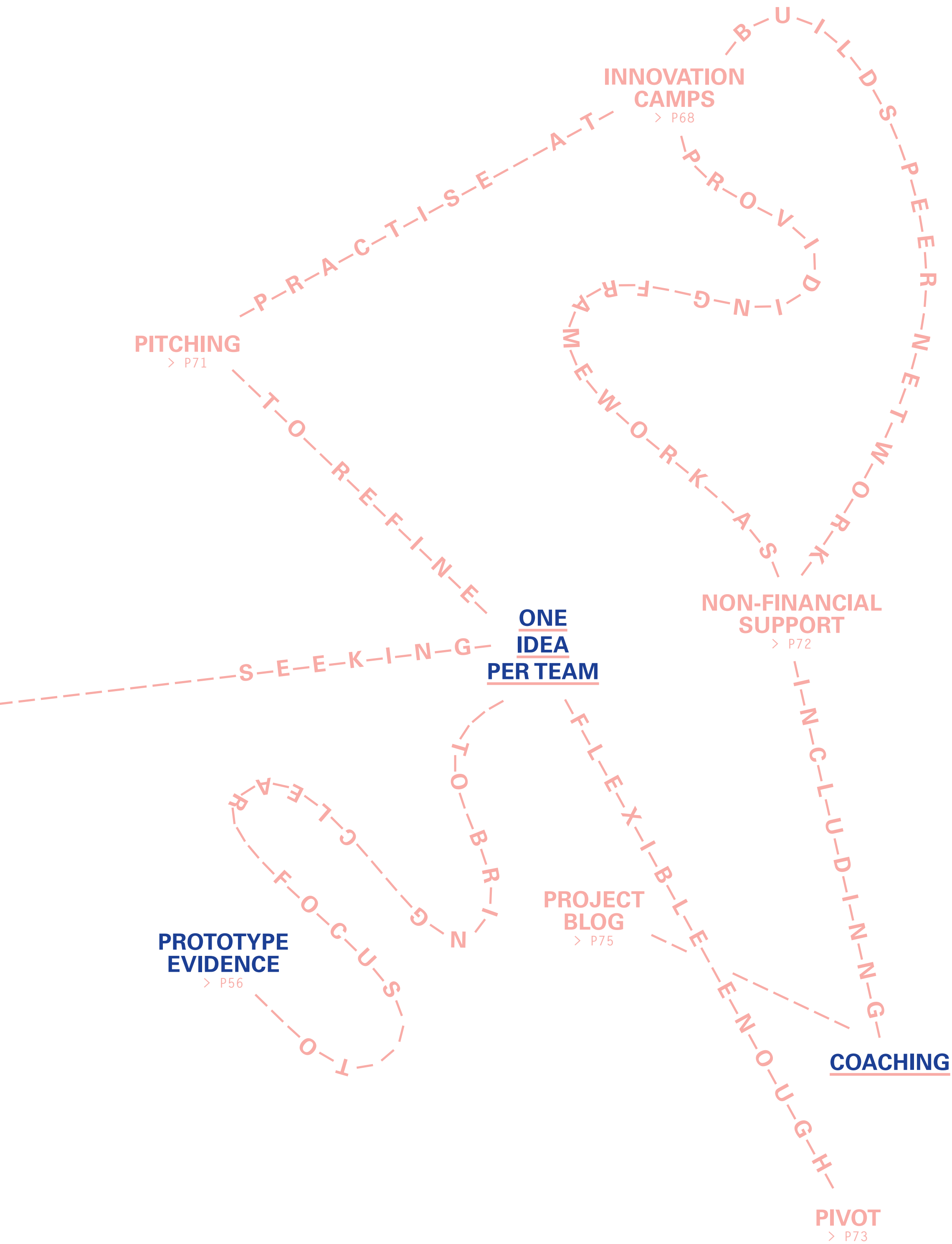
[11] **Pivot** > P73

Soon it became obvious that the innovators were themselves part and parcel to the viability of an innovation: without the right team, even a great idea would fall flat. Conversely, a great team might start out with an idea that was not very innovative, but with the right support they could develop the proposal into something better. This translated into the use of 'key person' clauses in the contracts that made funds available to the councils, effectively guaranteeing that the right people would stay involved with the project from inception through delivery. This gave the programme sponsors a degree of confidence that their investments into the councils would have a fair chance at succeeding, while simultaneously communicating to the councils that their innovative employees were important and should be given the necessary space to put radically new ideas into practise.

With the councils now well into the delivery of their projects, Nesta are reflecting upon their experiences up to this point to refine the model and develop a strategy for communications and potential expansion of Creative Councils to more localities.

OPEN CALL

ENCOURAGING COLLABORATION



INNOVATION CAMPS
> P68
BUILDS PEER NETWORK
PROVIDING FRAMEWORK AS
PRACTISE AT
PITCHING
> P71
TO REFINE
ONE IDEA PER TEAM
SEEKING
NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT
> P72
INCLUDING
TO BRING CLEAR FOCUS TO
FLEXIBLE ENOUGH
PROJECT BLOG
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PROTOTYPE EVIDENCE
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COACHING
PIVOT
> P73

Innovation camp

An immersive learning session, usually spanning a couple of days, in a location that is removed from daily operations.

Executed well, a camp can be an intense experience to foster peer-to-peer learning, skill building and strengthening of non-hierarchical social and professional bonds. Creative Councils organised five camps on themes such as refining the core proposition, clarifying the project plan and developing a roadmap for change. Each camp featured a mix of structured exercises led by Nesta and Innovation Unit as well as time for socialising within and between council teams and select guests. For the council teams, the camps were an important chance to iterate and refine their proposals, serving as a safe haven for teams to push their own boundaries and think differently.

Being physically removed from one's everyday setting helps create a mental break that gives people the ability to separate themselves from the demands of their day to day duties. Distance and a clearly allocated block of time enable the continuity of focus that is required to achieve a level of intensity that pushes people outside of their habitual ways of thinking. Nesta's Creative Councils camps began with a dinner and continued over two full days.

A two-day commitment was a lot to ask and typically unrealistic for council leadership. Instead Nesta invited the chief executives of the councils present to join for the opening dinner. This created a social setting where the project teams could interact directly with someone they would otherwise have had little contact with. While this sent important signals to the teams that their work was valued, it also helped socialise the council executives to a different way of getting things done in the public sector. In one instance, it led to the team negotiating with their executive a protocol for calling in support if their efforts were being stymied—this kind of cross-hierarchical connection would be almost unimaginable in a regular setting.

Hosting a group for these extended working sessions requires careful due diligence and concern for soft aspects of the experience such as the quality of the meeting rooms, hotel accommodations and food. Lavish arrangements are by no means necessary, but a basic concern for creature comforts will help participants recognize the camp as a special experience, make them feel cared for, and therefore stay focused on the work at hand. Nesta sent team members to personally verify facilities before making bookings. *Is it easy to get to? Do the windows open? Is the food healthy and tasty?*

Coaching was done by a combination of Nesta and Innovation Unit staff, the majority of whom already had a strong working relationship with each other. Essentially, the less time coaches needed to learn how their peers work, the more time could be spent helping the council teams. Individuals who had been involved over the lifetime of the Creative Councils project proved to be more effective than coaches brought in just for the camp, due to their ability to maintain continuity and draw on a deeper knowledge of how the councils' proposals had developed over time.

As an ancillary benefit, each camp expanded the amount of time that Nesta spent with the councils, allowing them to get to know each other better. The additional contact helped in moments of difficult decision-making as Nesta selected which teams would advance to the next round of the prograzmme.

Pitch

To describe your project (or an idea) in a succinct and compelling way.

Pitching serves two purposes: it is a form of communication and a way of developing our thinking by externalising ideas. Although 'sales pitch' can have a negative ring to it in conversations about public benefit, the term has experienced a revival with startup culture becoming more pervasive. In that context, pitching refers to explaining one's business idea quickly and clearly—based on the assumption that the person you are pitching to, either a potential customer or investor, will not spend much time listening unless you have a compelling story. A good pitch piques the listeners' interest enough to engage in a longer conversation, giving the person who pitched more time to fully explain their ideas. In that sense, the pitch acts as the conversational hook.

It is a pragmatic way of presenting that assumes by default the listener will evaluate what they are hearing in a short time-span and decide whether to stay engaged or not. As one develops an idea of any kind, be it for a business or a project, the necessity of receiving buy-in from potential collaborators, funders and individuals with an authorising role is a fact of life. In the context of social innovation, an emphasis on pitching recognises that even if there is no money being exchanged, ideas have to be convincing to get people to mentally buy into them. While in a better world good ideas might stand on their own, in our world they rarely do.

Like any ability, pitching can be developed through practise, but pitching over and over again also has the added benefit of helping you refine your ideas. Each time you practises a pitch you are externalising your proposition by articulating it verbally. What sounds good in your head may not work so well when spoken, and pitching is a way of discovering such snags which can then be addressed to improve the quality of the original proposition. Especially in the early stages when an idea is nascent, attempting to explain it to people is a great way to distil it to its essence.

The Creative Councils team continually pushed participants in their programme to articulate their proposals as a pitch, effectively forcing them to practise. Sometimes these pitches were prepared, but Nesta also manufactured situations where participants were put on the spot to present their ideas with only a couple of minutes warning. Standing up and trying to sell a proposal without much time to think anticipated future situations where team members would be confronted by citizens, chief executives and other individuals inquiring about the project at unexpected moments. These on-the-spot presentations also opened up space for ad-hoc communication and the generative possibility of spontaneous surprise.

Non-financial support

Knowhow, access and structure are important in the context of doing something new. Funders who offer 'non-financial' support more actively guide their grantees' work, and stand a better chance to help them accomplish their goals.

There are some things that money cannot buy, and sometimes giving money is too blunt an instrument. Through Creative Councils, Nesta supported the shortlisted councils with a panoply of means, many of which did not involve funds (though that happened too). The first and broadest level of non-financial support was the programme itself. By setting boundaries, identifying milestones and guiding teams along a learning journey, the design of the Creative Councils programme, from the open call through the camps and into delivery, provided a valuable framework for the application of both funds and attention. Compared to giving money alone, Nesta's move to establish a strong programmatic design effectively lowered the time-cost that might otherwise be spent while councils spun their wheels figuring out how to move forward.

Access to Nesta's strong network was the second non-cash benefit that they offered. By forming a peer network of innovative councils teams as well as bringing in outside voices at moments of inflection such as the camps, Nesta helped broaden the connectivity of the council teams within a community of innovative practitioners. This was an important investment in the future of the council teams, who will eventually be continuing the work without the assistance of Nesta. Building their own networks is essential for success later on.

The third, and most discrete, level of financial support came in the form of a menu of available services. Rather than give the councils money to hire in help with work such as ethnography, horizon scanning and coaching, Nesta opted to provide the councils access to pre-selected providers. By vetting and arranging working relationships ahead of time, Nesta freed the councils to engage at the point of highest utility, through which they benefitted from the services without incurring the overhead of administrative duties. This lowered the barrier for councils to integrate methods that may not have been part of their typical way of working and eliminated the possibility that other members of council staff—those outside the innovation team who did not see the value as clearly—could interfere with or stymie these unorthodox means.

While councils reported that this form of support was very useful, some still found it difficult to take advantage of the services, citing a lack of time as the primary blockage. Nesta and Innovation Unit coaches deliberated where to draw the line between making help available and insisting that it be utilised. A careful balance was struck in favour of giving the councils room to stumble every now and then—and in the process to learn by doing in a supportive and reflective environment.

Pivot

To pivot is to respond to failed assumptions, uncontrollable external events, or unforeseen opportunities by finding new means to achieve the ends you desire.

To plan is to change your business, to pivot is to let your business change you. Despite best efforts to analyze and plan, the world does not always play out according to the script we write for it. After a pivot you're headed in a new direction, but still rooted in the same first principles. In the context of innovation, success will be marked more by a team's ability to adjust to challenges and opportunities than its ability to stick to a predetermined plan.

The term is borrowed from the tech community where pivoting means changing business plans while retaining the same team and often some core aspect of the technology that was being developed by them. Pivoting comes out of a recognition that it's impossible, or at least quite unlikely, that one can plan and design a successful business proposition, or for that matter social innovation, without getting started and adjusting course when things work out differently than you had anticipated.

In the story of Creative Councils, the team pivoted when they realized their assumption that the councils' proposals would cluster around themes was not going to work out. Instead, the applications they received were all over the board. Clustering was devised as a way of spreading 'ideas that work' from one location to another that shared the same needs, but without clusters the team are now developing other ways to help good ideas spread. After spending a couple days testing different models of clustering Colligan and his team pivoted to a new plan, selecting proposals based on their individual merits, regardless of how they related to adjacent proposals. This had the positive effect of putting the emphasis in learning sessions onto the overlaps of process, method, and approach.

For those who are used to a more or less linear sequence from scoping to planning to execution to measurement, a pivot can be troubling. To allay these concerns, it's important to establish and maintain clear principles early in the life of a project. With these in hand, things may evolve over time but there will be a shared platform to collectively refer to when moments of difficulty present themselves. These principles will serve as a platform from which possible pivots may be analysed.

Project blogging

Keep a blog as a regularly updated journal of project experiences.

Most blogs are written from the perspective of an organisation or an individual, whereas project blogs record all the developments occurring within a project. They can be written by a single individual or an entire team. Use whatever blogging system is most convenient, which may involve looking to free options online, such as Wordpress.com, rather than relying on the default in-house tools, which can be too cumbersome to be effective.

Depending on the circumstances of the project, the blog can be public or private. While the natural tendency may be to keep things private to maintain confidentiality, writing via a public outlet means writing with an external audience—however small—which produces positive pressure to keep up the writing. In the case of Creative Councils, the coaches who worked with each of the 17 short-listed councils kept private project blogs detailing their meetings in brief 300-500 word bursts that could be typed up while riding the train home.

A good post on a project blog can be written in casual style, almost as if writing an email to a friend or colleague, and does not need to be laboured over. It is more important to get thoughts on the page than it is to make them great literature. As much as possible, emphasis should be placed on writing in the moment, when reflections are still fresh. This helps ensure that the nuances and small details on the top of one's mind do not get lost as time passes. Rather than trying to capture every aspect of a project's development, the blog will act as a memory aid. Reading over old posts helps one recall what was going on at a certain moment in the project's development. It should include both the matter-of-fact aspects (we did this) as well as subjective evaluations (it took more time than we expected).

Choosing a regular schedule and rota of writing duties or attaching writing to specific events (as Creative Councils did) will establish rhythm. Writing with relative frequency is useful, lest too much time elapse between posts and the story of the project become generalised beyond the point of being useful. Weekly posts, which some call "weeknotes," are a good starting point. If possible, use these regular posts in place of intermittent reporting obligations.

As posts accumulate, the blog supports reflections on one's innovation practises and acts as the extended memory of the project team, which can be useful in moments when a change of direction is being considered. The Creative Councils team also found that reading through old blog posts was a great way to bring new members of the team get up to speed.

Building new innovation capacity

Case 4
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

"When you're designing for all of America…
where do you start?"

Fred Dust

Project goal

Design a brand identity, engagement strategy, and discrete consumer-facing educational experiences for the nascent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Theory of change

IDEO would use human-centred design methods to arrive at a CFPB brand identity, engagement strategy and experiences that would resonate deeply with consumers and enable them to lead better financial lives. IDEO would help the bureau internalise core brand and engagement strategy principles and concepts through intensive participation in the human-centred design process. This exposure, coupled with IDEO-delivered reference designs would build the bureau's ability to sustain, extend and evolve the consumer engagement strategy.

Success factors and strokes of luck

Elizabeth Warren's character and accomplishments established a strong and early momentum with the public; IDEO was introduced to the bureau by members of the founding team who had links to Silicon Valley; IDEO found a capable internal advocate who was subsequently appointed to lead ongoing consumer engagement efforts; IDEO began working early on with the CFPB during its rapid phase of growth as an organisation.

With the United States still reeling from the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008, the Obama administration called for a new federal agency that would look out for ordinary consumers by putting an end to the "bewildering array of incomprehensible options" in credit cards, student loans, and mortgages. "Ridiculous contracts with pages of fine print that no one can figure out—those things will be a thing of the past," Obama announced in a speech on July 17, 2009 establishing the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). Its mission is to protect "Main Street" by overseeing Wall Street.

"Ridiculous contracts with pages of fine print that no one can figure out—those things will be a thing of the past."
President Obama

The founding team were already inclined to think differently about the formidable task of creating a new bureau from scratch. Incubated inside the Department of the Treasury, the CFPB adopted the ethos of an internet startup from the beginning.[1] They were data-driven and accepted that a consumer-focused federal bureau would have to pay extra care to establish and then maintain a good relationship with citizens, whose trust in government has been declining for years.[2] The bureau's creation was politically contentious as well, so it had to work fast to develop a new organisation, scale it up, communicate its mission clearly, and forge its services for citizens—all at the same time.

[1] **Rebrand public service** > P123

[2] **See "Public Trust in Government: 1958-2013" by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press** > L12

The CFPB knew that as a federal bureau aiming to serve citizens, their 'competition' was much broader. Being the best *federal* source of information about consumer finance was not good enough, since citizens would look more broadly, including to whichever site currently claimed the top position on popular search engines.[3] Borrowing from the experience of private sector successes such as Amazon, Facebook and Google, each of which has a strong brand that allows them to have a reciprocal relationship with their customers, the CFPB desired a strong and engaging relationship with citizens that would cement its status as the go-to source for unbiased information about personal finance.

[3] **Compete with the best** > P124

In its early days the CFPB was led by Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Warren, who was selected by President Obama based on her early and tireless advocacy on behalf of the new consumer agency. An article she wrote in 2007, *Unsafe at Any Rate*, was the genesis of many of the core ideas behind the CFPB. Warren is known for her "folksy credibility" and the ease with which she communicates even the most complex subject matter in a clear way. As a testament to her ability to make the often confusing financial material more digestible to citizens, Warren appeared on a popular American television show, Jon Stewart's *Daily Show*, three times during her time at the Bureau, an unusual qualification for anyone in government. This was a strength in the early phases of the bureau, helping to establish the ongoing tone of its work. With a mandate from the President and an initial direction established by Warren, the CFPB looked for help as they turned ideas into a live Bureau.

IDEO's human-centred design approach made them an attractive collaborator. They started working with the Bureau in March of 2011 on a dual timeline.[4] As the bureau grew rapidly from 30 to more than 900 employees, IDEO delivered a logomark and brand guidelines necessary for the CFPB's official launch on July 21st, 2011. On a longer timeline IDEO worked with the Bureau to create a consumer engagement strategy and put it into practise by co-designing a "Paying for College" set of tools and information for students and parents.

[4] Dual Timeline > P86

The initial focus on brand was not without contention as it was first understood by some within the Bureau to be synonymous with advertising. In an early meeting, grumblings that "government doesn't have any money to spend on advertising" were aired. These objections dissolved over time as IDEO introduced their rigorous human-centred design process and "brand" came to be understood more broadly as a way of maintaining a coherent interface between the bureau and the outside world. From this perspective, the logo and other visual guidelines were important ways for the CFPB to differentiate itself as consumer-oriented and of a new era, where often bureaus can feel more bureaucratic. Far from branding as advertising, this meant that IDEO and the CFPB would work together to define the way that the bureau would approach its communications and the design of its products so that everything the Bureau does exudes its operational ethos of "authority, savviness… and citizen engagement."

Work began with research into the experiences and perspectives of citizens, including roughly twenty ethnographic visits with users who represented edge cases. In a conscious move to avoid what IDEO Project Lead Hailey Brewer calls the "sea of sameness" at the middle of the bell curve, IDEO sought individuals who occupied the edges of the curve, those who had extreme relationships and experiences with credit cards and other financial services.[5] CFPB members accompanied IDEO on some of these visits to strengthen the

[5] Work at the extremes > P53

in-house understanding of ethnography and how to apply it on their own.

The qualitative findings from this early research, as well as on-going user testing, would be an essential tool used by the CFPB and IDEO to make decisions on an ongoing basis. The Bureau had said from the start that they were committed to evidence-based decision making, and through the ethnographic experiences with IDEO this came to include qualitative evidence as well as quantitative. As compelling as the ethnographic visits were, a minority of CFPB employees could participate in them, so IDEO looked for other ways to spread the stories within the bureau whenever possible, sometimes fleshing out individual bits of evidence into more holistic narratives.[6]

[6] **Anchoring artefacts** > P93

If the qualitative evidence was not actionable its impact on daily operations would be limited, so IDEO took extra care to build both an analytical framework and a shorthand language[7] that would enable their insights to be more useful within the CFPB. Perhaps the most significant outcome from this perspective was IDEO's proposal to switch from catering to different roles such as parent, student, or homeowner to focusing on behavioural types that summarise the way an individual approaches various financial decisions in their life. IDEO identified four basic behavioural types ("Believers, Followers, Gamers, and Investigators") which then provided the CFPB with the tools they needed to focus their efforts. By nature a federal bureau must serve all Americans, but "When you're designing for all of America… where do you start?" asks IDEO partner Fred Dust. With four behavioural types defined, the CFPB could more carefully decide which citizens to focus on first and how to make products relevant to that particular peer group.

[7] **Make it sticky** > P92

In both understanding user needs and developing design proposals IDEO worked iteratively. When creating visual material such as the logomark, proposals were made in rounds with feedback[8] on each round collected from across the organisation in a single day using a novel—but exhausting—invention they dubbed the "four layer meeting."[9] Whereas a typical design process might include preliminary presentations of sketchy material that is indicative of a direction but lacks detail, IDEO attempted as much as possible to show 'high-resolution' sketches representing multiple possible conceptual directions[10] during these meetings. Each potential direction featured its own distinct 'texture' and specificity, enabling feedback to occur simultaneously at an

[8] **Heatmap** > P91

[9] **Layered meeting** > P89

[10] **High resolution provocations** > P87

abstract and a more granular, concrete level. Ideas without details and details without ideas are both risky, so IDEO relied on high-resolution provocations that combined both. This was practical due to the compressed timeline, but also served as a way to subtly reinforce the connection between intentions and actions established in the brand guidelines.

Once the Bureau was publicly launched, IDEO turned its attention towards the CFPB's consumer engagement strategy: how would they create useful and engaging products for citizens? This kicked off with the co-design and development of a "Paying for College" online tool. In April of 2012, the team launched a public beta version.[11] After a trial period the beta was taken offline to be refined and relaunched as a permanent service in December of the same year.

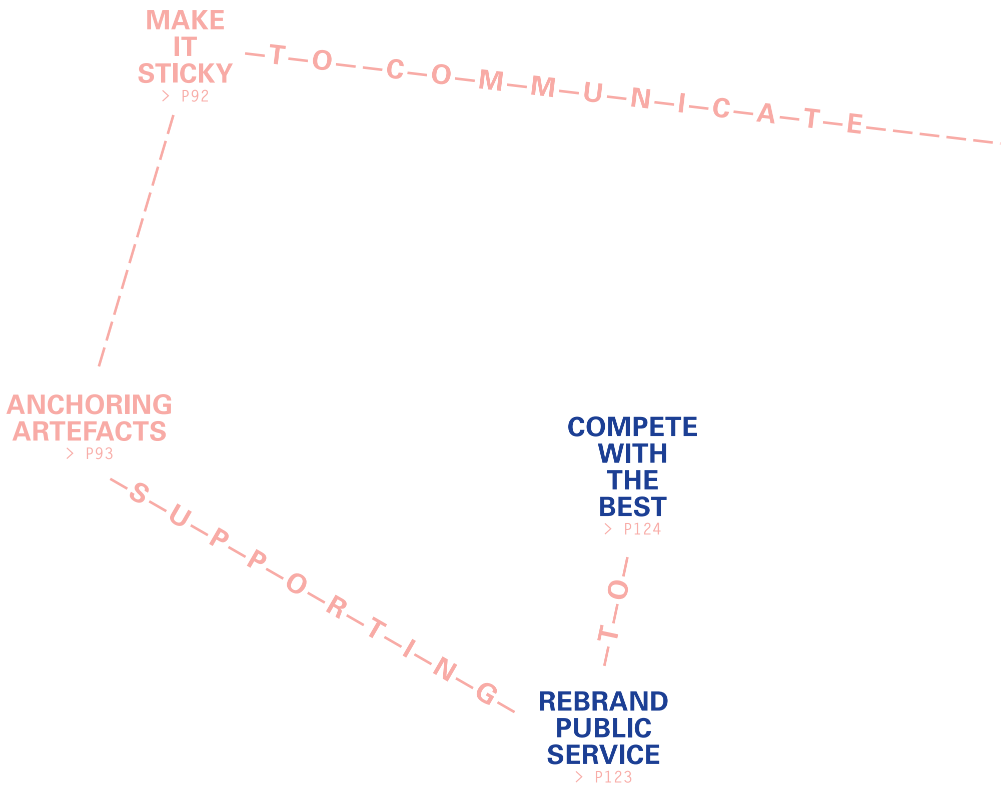
[11] **Public beta** > P128

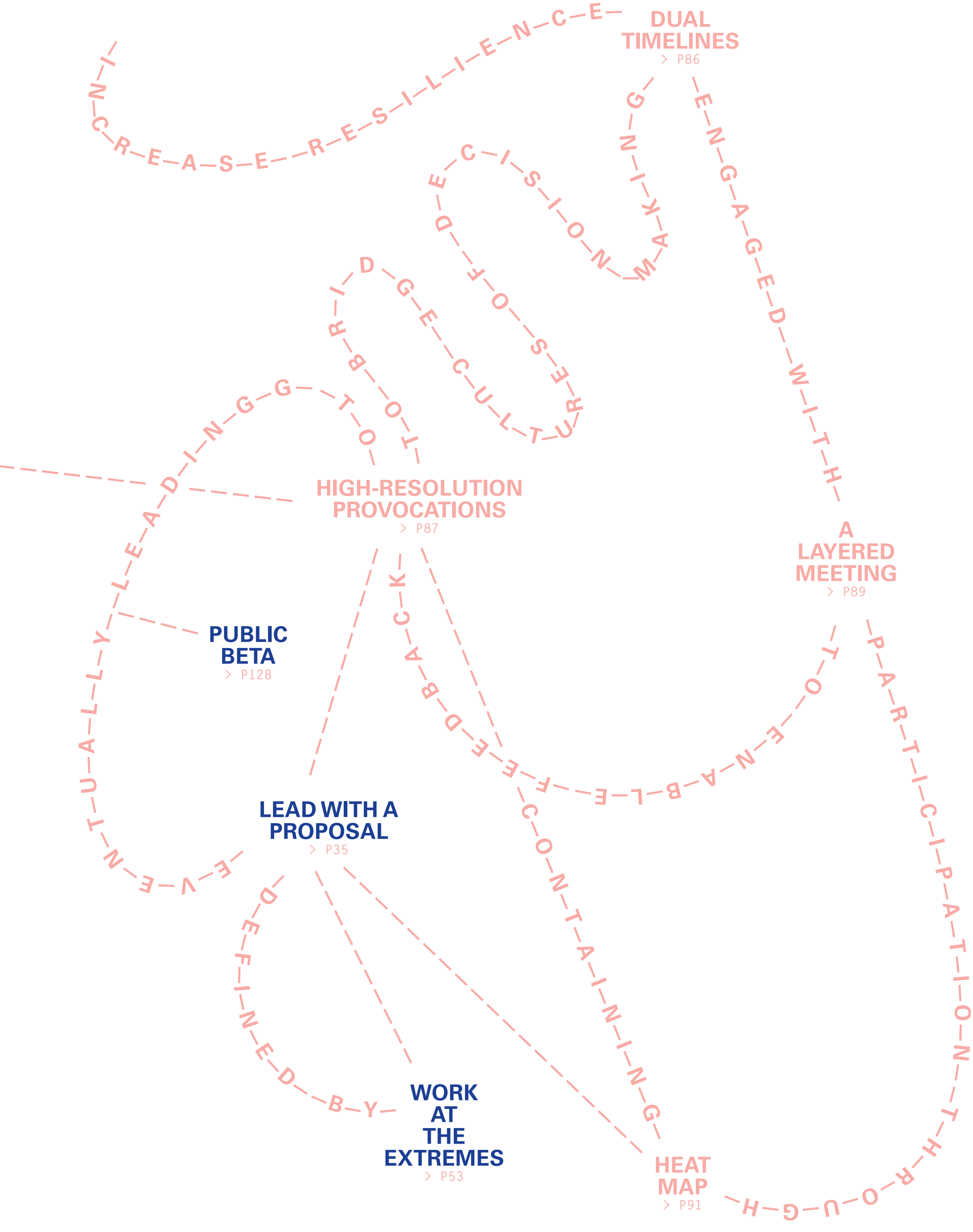
The effort was twofold: create a finished suite of tools and information, and simultaneously iterate and refine a "generative framework" or DNA for the design of future consumer experiences that the Bureau will build on its own. By working with a tangible project such as an online tool for prospective students, IDEO seeded a specific approach to product development within the Bureau. The dual nature of the relationship was a constant subtext to the collaboration.

IDEO and the CFPB needed to work quickly to meet politically significant deadlines, while also being careful not to create too wide a gap between the Bureau and its external consultants. Although IDEO were often taking the lead on the collaboration with the Bureau, they consciously worked at a pace that made it possible for the appropriate teams within the Bureau to learn from the process as well, beyond merely receiving the outcomes. Building and diffusing capability and alignment within the Bureau was its own important project goal.

Internal alignment within the organisation and editorial authority were critical factors for the success of the Bureau's ability to maintain a coherent brand. Peter Jackson, who has previously been Elizabeth Warren's communications advisor, worked to buttress moments of inclusive decision-making led by IDEO. He was positioned to link the Bureau's beginnings to its ongoing efforts so as to present a coherent brand. Eventually Jackson was selected for the role of Assistant Director for Consumer Engagement, which helped ensure ongoing alignment among consumer-facing initiatives by consolidating purchasing authority and a mandate to work horizontally across all of the Bureau's silos.

This contributed to human-centred design methods being applied beyond the bounds of IDEO's discrete projects, a positive indicator that the Bureau's early experience with a tangibly different approach to innovation helped set them on the path to becoming a human-centred federal bureau.




INCREASE RESILIENCE
DUAL TIMELINES
> P86
TO BRIDGE CULTURES OF DECISION MAKING
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Dual timelines

A dual timeline entails quickly delivering something small and discrete to help build momentum and generate buy-in while subsequently collaborating at a larger scale with a longer timeline.

When the goal is to help an organisation develop its own capability, dual timelines have the benefit of tangibly making a difference up front while allowing for capability to build over a more reasonable timeline.

When IDEO was asked to work with the CFPB, the Bureau wanted help on two kinds of task. At a fast pace, IDEO managed the end-to-end design of specific deliverables including a logomark while working at a slower pace to co-design an online tool with Bureau staff. These parallel streams of work were differentiated by the extent to which the effort was shared between IDEO and the CFPB. Faster work allowed IDEO to use their internal 'muscle' to move quickly whereas slower work left more room for cross-organisational learning between IDEO and the Bureau. As the two organisations continue to work together, IDEO finds itself stepping back from the process earlier and earlier, as the Bureau is able to continue independently.

In the case of the CFPB, dual timelines were a pragmatic way to help the Bureau meet their stipulated launch date. Handling certain tasks quickly and others more slowly was simply the only way to satisfy the calendar and meet a high level of ambition. Borrowing the old cliché, IDEO's approach was to give the Bureau a fish, let them enjoy the meal, and then teach them how to catch their own.

Dividing an ambitious body of work into two parallel timelines helps make it more resilient in a dynamic environment. This strategy can also be applied in contexts where there may be scepticism towards new approaches or methodologies by using the quick cycle to build understanding and buy-in for the longer effort.

High-res provocations

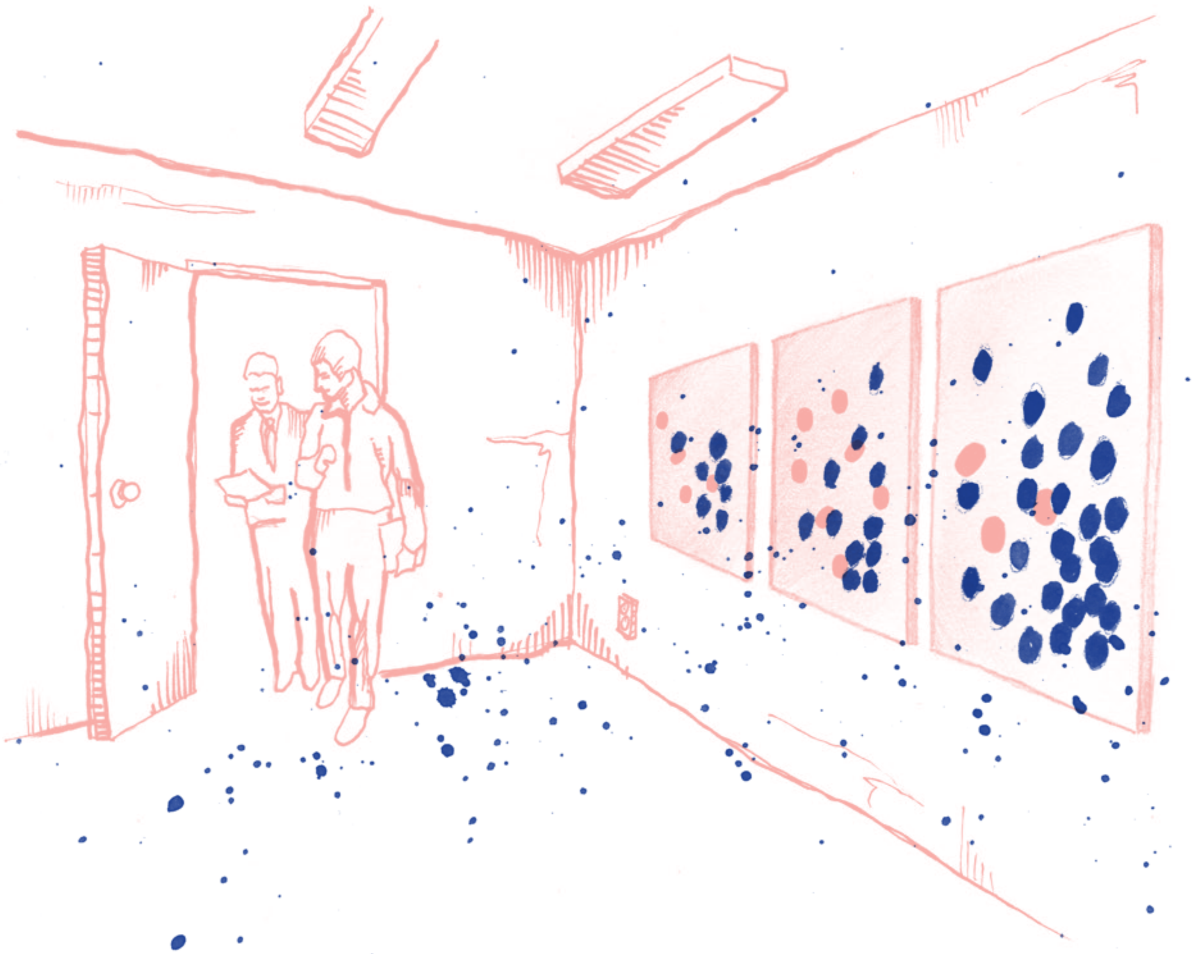
Present a range of conceptual options represented in high resolution, so that the differences between them are strong enough to provoke debate.

Often a high level of refinement is taken to indicate that a design is 'complete.' On the contrary, IDEO's work with the CFPB—and their design process in general—employed high-resolution provocations to help individuals imagine or debate the near future in a more visceral way, both intellectually and emotionally. Whereas a linear process moves from fuzzy to concrete over time, an iterative design process regularly cycles between rough sketches and more refined presentations.

Working at high resolution or 'high res' implies caring for and representing the details of materials that you produce. As they developed a visual language and logomark for the Bureau, IDEO regularly presented a group of options that each indicated different conceptual directions. Although they were early drafts, the options were not presented in a rough style. Rather, as high resolution provocations they looked final and equally plausible. These provocations were used to organise discussion in layered meetings,[12] helping a group debate the merits of different approaches more clearly.

When using this approach, it is important to present a variety of options rather than a single possibility, so that the set "gives a sense of divergence," as Brewer puts it. Doing so reinforces the notion that, although plausibly realistic, the materials presented are just a sketch that will be iterated upon. The goal is not to pick one and be done, but to use the contrasting details of the proposals as 'grappling points' in a discussion about how to proceed.

[12] **Layered meeting** > P89



Layered meeting

A series of meetings hosted on a single day, designed to balance the socialisation of new ideas into the organisation, the collection of widespread feedback, and the need to make quick decisions that do not alienate or disenfranchise various layers of internal decision-makers.

Start with the broadest audience and move to smaller circles of decision making so that the final decision point benefits from an accumulated trail of discussion and suggestions. Within each layer, participants give feedback through voting or other means (IDEO used Heatmaps).[13] The collected response is then brought to the next layer so that an organisational zeitgeist on the presented topics manifests over the course of the day.

At the CFPB four layers were used:

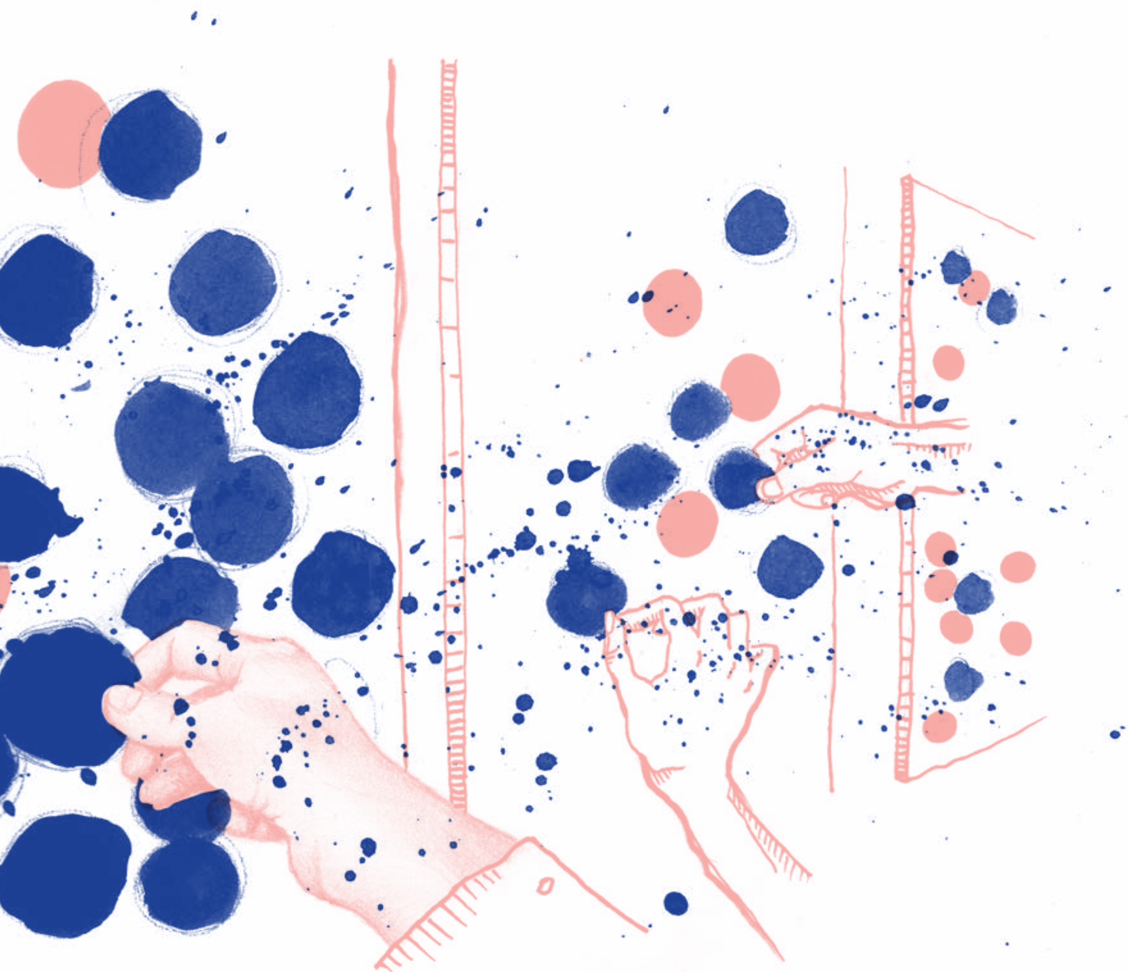
1. Voluntary all-hands meeting (50+ people with a positive trend over time)
2. Advisory committee (~12 people)
3. Executive team (~12 people)
4. Chief executive and project team (~4 people)

The layered meeting allowed IDEO to maintain a broad surface of contact within a fast-growing organization that expanded by an order of magnitude during the course of the project. This helped them stay acquainted with the evolving culture of the Bureau and made it more likely that future stakeholders and partners within the CFPB would already be familiar with the consumer engagement insights and strategy when it came time for them to get involved more directly.

Gathering feedback through a layered process offered IDEO a way to balance the egalitarian environment of a technology startup, which the Bureau had adopted, and the top-down decision-making needed to move quickly. The voluntary session helped the team remain open to unexpected contributions and was a useful way to gauge internal interest over time.

The approach is demanding due to the additional preparatory work needed for multiple rounds of engagement and the personal stamina needed to conduct back-to-back sessions. Effective processes and methods for eliciting egalitarian feedback are important to the success of this approach.

[13] **Heat map** > P91



Heat map

When searching for the right balance between different concept directions, post a range of proposals on the wall and ask participants to vote with a fixed number of 'like' and 'dislike' stickers.

Use the resulting heat map to guide a discussion about shared goals, trade-offs and tensions. This works best when the proposals[14] are presented as provocations,[15] with strong conceptual differences between them.

Heat mapping is intended to be an easy, lo-fi way to make decisions, so no special equipment is required. You may use sticky notes or markers of different colours, stickers with different images, or anything else that allows you to quickly gauge the density of positive and negative marks. The goal is to be able to differentiate between affirmative and negative at a glance so that this exercise can be done quickly.

When only affirmative feedback is collected it is possible to see winners and losers, but points of tension are less obvious. Asking participants to cast affirmative and negative votes yields a more complete picture of how a group feels about a range of proposals, including the points of tension that accumulate likes and dislikes simultaneously. By posting the options on the wall this activity allows for individuals to offer feedback on specific aspects of the proposals or on their entirety. This finer grain of feedback will be more useful in subsequent design iteration or revisions.

Depending on the internal dynamics of the organisation, anonymous feedback may be helpful in creating the opportunity for contradictory opinions to be comfortably expressed. A heat map's many dots will quickly become anonymous if you avoid coding voting stickers to the individual.

[14] **Lead with a proposal** > P35
[15] **High-res provocations** > P87

Make it sticky

Format should not trump content, but a bit of attention to the packaging and communication of an idea or insight can help it spread more widely through an organisation.

Good insights and ideas can get lost if they are not also easy to communicate. Simple language and frameworks help ensure design and development work is more naturally grounded in user insights. Creating a 'sticky' language for these findings helps key insights become memorable and therefore actionable as part of everyday decision-making.

Although IDEO's ethnographic research for the CFPB was compelling in its own right, they took extra care to build a narrative and vocabulary of names and phrases that would help the experiences more easily link to everyday decision-making within the Bureau. This focus on 'stickiness' recognises that even the smartest among us only have so much room in their brains to remember things.

What's effective within a particular organisation will depend on its own internal linguistic culture or cultures and the terms, idioms, and references that are relevant to them.

In the story of the CFPB, foundational insights that became shared reference points and anchors included:

- Four basic behavioural types coined as Believers, Followers, Gamers, and Investigators offered CFPB staff a simple, accurate and actionable shorthand when talking about target users. This behaviour segmentation was achieved by mapping consumer behaviour discovered during ethnographic research on a 2x2 matrix with axes running from 'information driven' to 'identity driven' and from 'rules are fixed' to 'rules are flexible'. The names are still in use within the organisation.
- Quotations from ethnographic interviews that embodied key insights from the user's perspective. The phrase 'credit is cash, not debt' came out of field visits and helped the CFPB's financial experts empathise with the perspective of some citizens who focus on the helpful aspects of credit (it is effectively cash available in a pinch) without fully appreciating the repayment commitment.

Anchoring artefacts

Purposefully and carefully create new artefacts that help anchor the ongoing development of a new culture, particularly well-crafted ones that people desire to keep them around.

Tangible artefacts—documents, objects and other material—subtly embody or express the values of an organisation. Especially when an organisation is growing rapidly or attempting to transform itself, high-res artefacts help embody organisational or operational change which is often more abstract and invisible.

On their own, tokens are not a very effective way to build alignment and engagement within an organisation. As part of a more careful effort to establish the shared values, language and behaviours of an organisation, however, material artefacts become important elements of punctuation in a process or experience. The distribution of tangible artefacts can also help engender ownership amongst stakeholders by creating a sense of belonging, and enabling a more personal relationship with the content. Two anecdotes from the CFPB illustrate this.

During the initial research for the brand and consumer engagement strategy, IDEO created a set of postcards from the field that featured a photo of each consumer along with their story of financial hardship. Each team member received a set of the postcards, and some chose to keep the postcards visible in their workspace, inspiring their day-to-day work and exposing coworkers to the insights as well. Careful attention to the design of these postcards allowed them to communicate clearly and compellingly on their own, without the need for lengthy explanation.

The proposed last step of new employee induction at the CFPB provides another example. With a similar level of care devoted to the design of the employee pledge card, a new ritual could be created signalling the CFPB's aspirations to be a new breed of government workplace.

Although it has not been adopted yet, the craft of the pledge card concretely manifests a new organisation. According to Hailey Brewer, "the beauty of the card's craft and letterpress printing communicates care" and encourages a personal connection. Even without reading any of the text, one is able to sense that something is important about this document.

Building high quality public services

Case 5
Branchekode.dk

"Services which are easier for citizens are easier for frontline workers too, and that combination saves money."

Sune Knudsen

Project goals

Transform a Danish government service (Branchekode.dk) responsible for generating classification categories needed to register a new business.

Theory of change

Cost efficiency and quality of user experience could be improved for customers and government staff alike by using human-centred design to substantially upgrade an online service. Strong success in one service would act as a proof of concept that all services could be made easier for business owners and civil servants alike, saving time, money and frustration.

Success factors and strokes of luck

MindLab is a cross-silo innovation lab, acting as a "neutral space" within government; Sune Knudsen, commissioner of the project, was familiar with MindLab's service design practise from his previous experience as an employee there.

Branchekode.dk is a small but necessary part of the lives of all businesses in Denmark. It is a website used by businesses to register with the government by correctly choosing which out of more than 700 NACE codes[1] that define areas of economic activity. Formally the government uses the codes to classify a particular line of business for statistical purposes. But the data is also listed in public databases and used by other authorities for administrative purposes.

[1] **Branchekode is the Danish equivalent to the international statistical system known as NACE codes *(Nomenclature des Activités Économiques dans la Communauté Européenne)*, developed for statistical purposes by the UN and EU.**

Say you have a shoe factory. You might search the system to discover that you qualify as 15:20:00, "footwear of any material made with any process." Except if you make boots, because those are filed under 32:30:00 as "sports equipment." Oh, but wait, do you sell ski boots too? If so, you may be 47:72:10. And if you also offer repair services, then it could be 95:23:00… Online, these options were presented in almost clinical terminology. Unless you search using exactly the same words that the system uses to describe your business, you would be lost.

Based on this simple vignette, perhaps it is not surprising that the error rate was estimated to be hovering around 25 per cent in early 2011. The Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs chose this system as an opportunity to demonstrate the value of closing the 'last mile' separating well-considered regulations from effective use by citizens. Sune Knudsen, office head at the Danish Business Authority (DBA) who commissioned the revamp of Branchekode, thought that this project could "show that services which are easier for citizens are easier for frontline workers too, and that combination saves money."[2] Although the code is a relatively minor piece of data from a systems perspective, some business owners tend to associate it directly with taxation and are naturally concerned not to mess things up where tax is concerned.

[2] **Quoted from an unpublished interview by Christian Bason.**

The DBA asked MindLab to help them redesign Branchekode. As a cross-Ministry innovation lab set up to facilitate the active involvement of citizens and businesses in developing new public sector solutions, MindLab's positioning makes it a unique resource within the Danish government. Although relatively small, MindLab had accumulated an outsized reputation by this point and Knudsen himself had previously spent time there as an employee.[3] The Tax Authority, DBA staff with knowledge about easing administrative burdens, Statistics Denmark, and front-line personnel would also be involved in the project. In this way many different aspects of the problem were covered and a number of competencies

[3] **Grow your own champions**
> P104

were in place, but aligning the various stakeholders became very important. MindLab's status as a cross-silo organisation allowed them to act as a neutral platform.

The project began with needs-finding, including a series of interviews with business people who had experienced extreme interactions with the system.[4] Government staff-people accompanied MindLab on these visits in a conscious effort to spread professional empathy throughout the coalition of organizations involved. They also participated in workshops afterwards to synthesise the insights. Audio recordings were made of the interviews, allowing the material to be edited for use in later situations, where the need for change could be powerfully conveyed to individuals who were not able to be part of the ethnographic fieldwork first hand.[5]

[4] Work at the extremes > P53

[5] Audio interviews > P109

Close observation in the field led the team to realise that while the service in question was digital, its "frontline" spanned both online and off.[6] Some users who became frustrated with the website resorted to calling a telephone hotline or going so far as to visit an office in person. Because the 'branchekodes' are a cross silo administrative area between DBA and Statistics Denmark, users were confused as to where they could get information and often contacted several authorities before finding an answer. Some users associated the code with taxes and expected the taxation offices to have answers. This mistaken assumption led to added confusion on the part of users and frontline staff at both the DBA and the Tax Authority, which was further compounded by the lack of plainly written instructive text on the Branchekode website. An important outcome from this process was a system map[7] that described how the interaction between user and government was assumed to flow seamlessly via the digital interface, but in actuality included many potential diversions that caused delays and other difficulties.

[6] Find the frontline > P107

[7] System map > P110

The findings helped the team come to terms with the scale of the problem: it was not a matter of business owners losing a few minutes while they fiddled with an unwieldy website, rather this small matter had in some cases eaten up hours of time for certain individuals. Nor was it something that affected only end-users; the administrative burdens were also high. While the authorities had a general understanding of the issue beforehand, by synthesising the users' frustrations, grappling with the scale of their needs, and pinpointing high cost interactions within the system, the team was able to establish a high bar for the necessary change. Customer-focused ethnography was mirrored by a similar effort within the system to foster empathy towards users and administrators alike.

Based on previous experience a decision was made to follow a human-centred design methodology to create the new Branchekode. Fieldwork and user involvement of business owners and government staff were again important sources of inspiration for the design proposal.

Sitting on the desk of one frontline worker was a binder containing all of the Branchekodes. Unlike the website, however, the binder had been modified by its owner, with an abundance of scribbles and scraps signalling that this was a living document. The owner's notations were intended to provide more context to the terse business descriptions, or to supplement the listings with new types of ventures and their codes. *What is the code for a crowdfunding entrepreneur?* Looking around, the team discovered that many frontline workers had developed similar workarounds out of a can-do spirit. Yet, because they were individual solutions, these fixes were trapped within the local office at best, without a pathway to easily propagate upwards and instigate positive, coordinated effects across the system. To complicate things further, while occasionally these ad-hoc edits to the Branchekode manuals were resourceful, they could be differently resourceful between two side-by-side staff members, opening another potential area of confusion.

[8] **Mascot** > P111

The binder took on an iconic status[8] for the team as they transitioned to making proposals. Observing the dynamics of the frontline office had sharpened their understanding of the relationship between business owners and frontline workers, and also the missing relationship between different authorities. This was the genesis for a possible solution: how could the website be more user-friendly for business owners while acting like a single shared 'binder' for all staff members?

Working from July through September, the team rapidly iterated through clickable prototypes of a new Branchekode service, soliciting feedback from business owners and frontline workers along the way. The new design provides a more flexible search interface, does a better job of explaining things to the user in plain language, gives the users hints on whether the code is right for them by listing related businesses for the most commonly confused codes, and allows frontline workers to add tags to the database so that the system effectively becomes 'self-learning.' Updates made by frontline workers to streamline their own job and aid with internal coordination also improve the system for business owners.[9]

[9] Create upside > P34

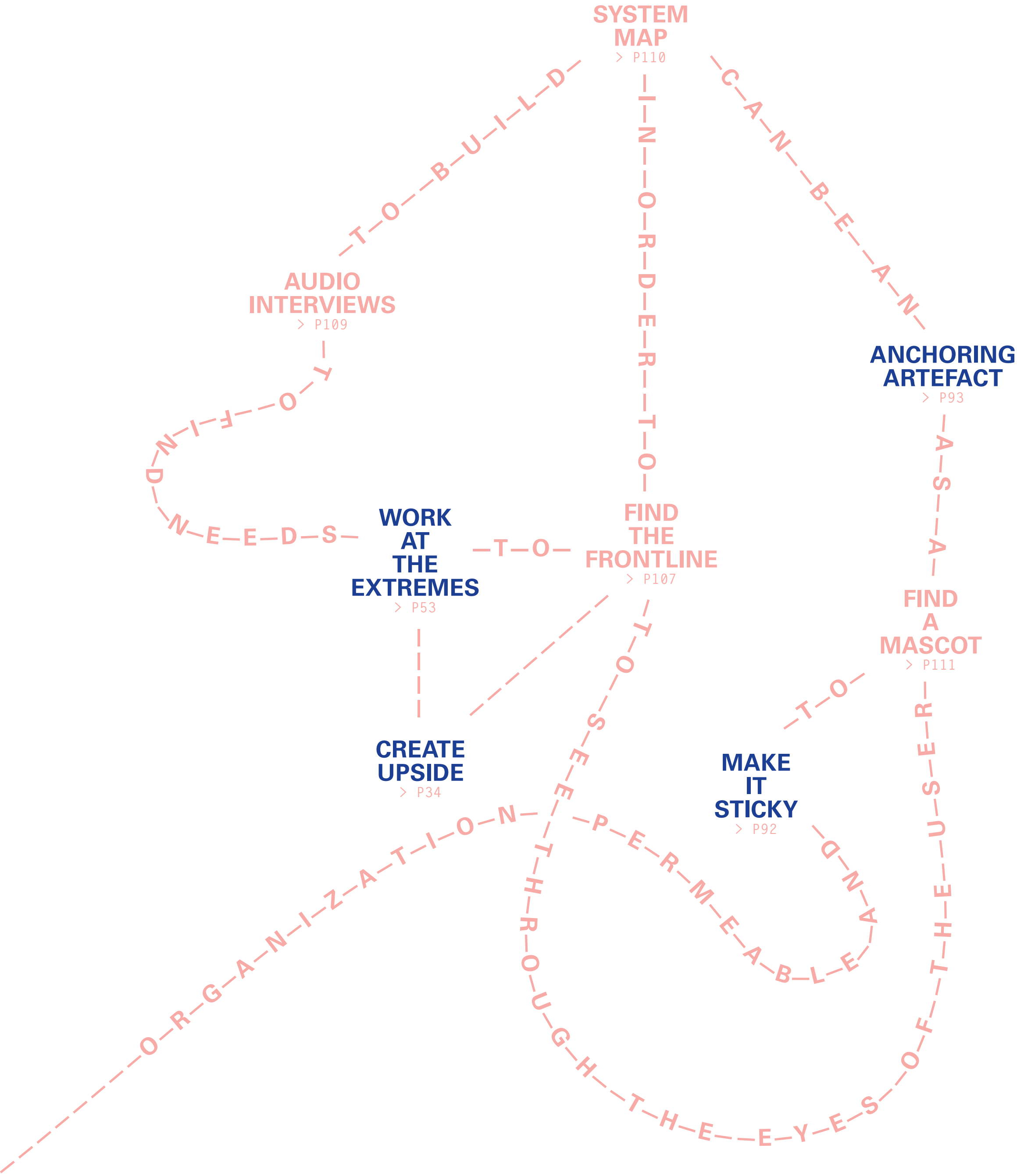
While the design flowed rapidly, stewarding the solution involved finding a way beyond an impasse arising from the collaboration of different professions and the cultures of decision-making they entail. Research had shown that the legal tone of the writing on Branchekode.dk was stifling users' ability to use the site properly. The potential upside to be gained from the adoption of more colloquial language was strongly argued by the design proposal, justified by the field-work insights and easily accomplished on a technical level. One part of the client consortium that empathised with the users felt strongly that this was a clear win. From the perspective of potential downside, however, changing the language represented risk for another part of the client consortium.

If the terminology was legally defined, what right did a project team have to change it, they asked? MindLab approached this carefully by finding time to engage privately with the individual whose sign-off was needed. In the end, respectful debate and a wealth of examples from other government resources that had supplemented legal terminology with plain language gave the whole consortium enough confidence to continue with the design proposal as planned. DBA and Statistics Denmark sat together to formulate text that use easily-understood language while still satisfying the official descriptions. By doing this the team were able to satisfy the multiple bottom lines at stake in a service like Branckode. The new version works well for users while also providing accurate statistics.

At the end of 2011 the project team had produced a well-tested information architecture, wireframes of the new service and a clickable prototype to demonstrate interaction styles. Besides the prototype, MindLab also developed a manual explaining how each function of the site addresses the user's challenges. This was passed to the DBA's development team who subsequently built the new service. As a descriptive and explicit document, the manual served as an unofficial contract between MindLab and the client consortium, helping development efforts stay on track by allowing the stakeholders to check progress against a shared point of reference. Additionally, a projective business case showed that the new site would pay for itself twenty-one times within three years, helping to assure the client consortium that money spent on the project was well invested.

The final product was ambitious but realistic and its development from within the authorities made it not only possible, but persuasive. With a number of disciplines represented in the project team, and individuals coming from across government, they were able to work together to co-create the new service which launched in early 2013.

GROW YOUR OWN CHAMPIONS
> P104
BY MAKING YOUR


SYSTEM MAP
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USER
ORGANIZATION
PERMEABLE
AND
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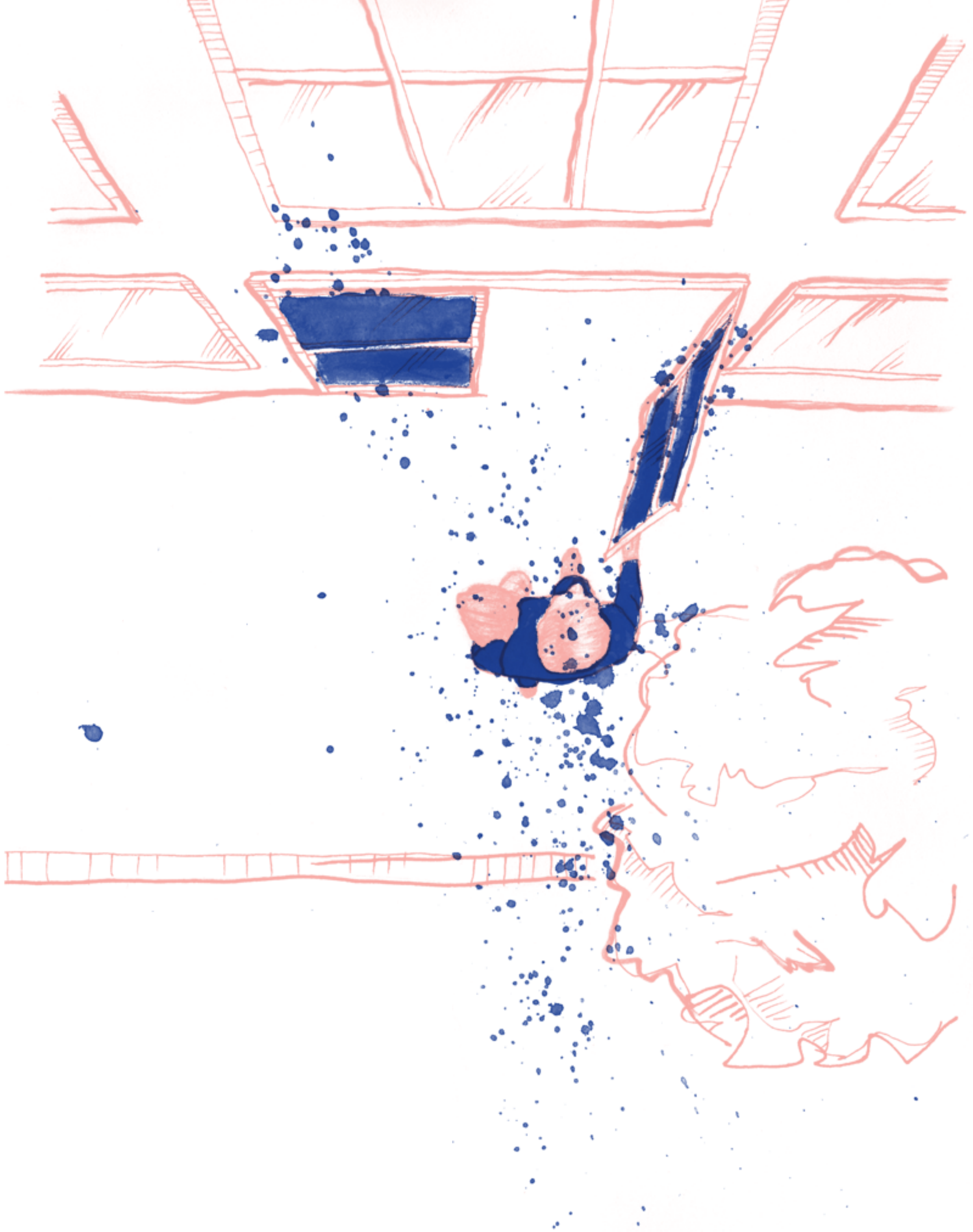
Grow your own champions

Enhance the likelihood that enlightened clients will come knocking on your door by consciously creating opportunities for outsiders to get to know your work better through an engagement that suits them and fits your operations.

Making your organisation or team more permeable to the outside world helps build a network of individuals who understand what you are doing on a deeper level. This is important because new approaches need to be cultivated and developed, and that takes time. The more you are able to offer outsiders a way to become familiar with, and participate in, your ongoing activities, the easier it will be for them to understand and see value in your approach. Since the start, MindLab have been consciously building a network of shared interest toward their approach and mission. This includes low-commitment activities such as workshops, publications and 'roadshows' across government departments as well as making more significant commitments such as seconding government staff into MindLab, and MindLab staff into government. A steady stream of PhD students and interns further increases the number of people who've experienced MindLab from the inside and therefore increases the odds that they will become champions of the organisation in the future. In addition to making room for others to become involved in MindLab's activities, they also prioritise sitting on strategy and policy committees when invited to do so. At this stage, ex-MindLab people—those who have been "MindLabbed", one could say—are among the strongest advocates for the group's work and the most effective way of spreading their design culture into government. Indeed, Sune Knudsen who commissioned the Branchekode redesign, had spent a few years at MindLab and was therefore primed to see that MindLab's capabilities would be useful. He was also able to intelligently procure their services and effectively coach his own staff, who had no direct prior experience with design methods. By investing time into growing their own champions, MindLab are working to a further horizon, creating ripples of change, and possibly future clients.



Find the frontline

Follow real users' interactions with a system to discover the 'experienced frontline.' This is where users expect to interact with your services which might not always match up with the design assumptions of the system itself.

The frontline is not where you expect it to be, but where your users decide it is. With user research techniques that are tried-and-tested in the commercial world, but still underutilised in the public sector, DBA sought out the frontline staff and spent time with them. Through observations and interviews with staffers and management, the team were able to understand Branchekode more empathically. These engagements enabled the project team to perceive the 'seams' of the system: the places where intervention or reinvention of services was possible.

While they were finding the frontline, the team articulated their insights in the form of service design artefacts such as a system map.[10] These were used to illustrate a user's journey as they interacted with multiple organisations attempting to fulfil their needs. They provided a strong visual way to differentiate between the official frontline and how users were expecting the system to work.

Seeing the frontline through the eyes of your users helps in a number of ways. It may refine your initial perceptions of a system as you take a more empathic point of view. If one is hyper-observant of the environments and behaviours they spend time with during this process, it can also be a useful way to discover potential solutions that already exist at a small scale.[11] Finally, involving members of the frontline in the design process brings their intelligence and experiences into the project and gives them purchase with a solution that will ultimately impact their work. When people have actively contributed to the development of a new design solution they are more likely to adopt the eventual outcome.

Helping people describe what is actually happening is a prerequisite for change. As MindLab observes, "you need to establish a language [for failure] before it gets out of hand." This is both the official language of the existing system, the tacit language of unobserved failure, and ultimately the language of the new system. This begins with finding the frontline.

[10] **System map** > P110
[11] **Mascot** > P111

Audio interviews

Sometimes more detail does not help tell a better story.

A limited number of people are able to directly participate in ethnographic fieldwork. But thoughtful use of media embeds the experience into material artefacts that can help spread the insights throughout an organisation. As Runa Sabroe of MindLab sees it, the first step in redesigning anything is to “make [people] want to change it” and hearing first-hand the negative effects of a poorly designed service, policy, or programme is a good way of inspiring the will to change.

Frontline engagement had produced rich insights into a system that needed replacing. This would potentially enable a form of empathy within bureaucratic systems that often struggle with it but, as MindLab observed, “it’s hard to scale professional empathy.” Yet MindLab’s media artefacts are a form of communication that does scale. They “make the problem (and solution) come alive.”

MindLab used audio recordings to document their interviews which were then edited from more than an hour down to narratives of less than three minutes, each illustrating different insights. The team hired recently-downsized audio engineers from the national broadcasting corporation to skilfully edit the interviews. Audio—at the time chosen because it was easier and faster than dealing with video—turned out to have just the right balance of evocative potential and ease of use. MindLab favours audio because it captures the emotion of a situation while leaving room for interpretation by listeners. Audio files are useful in a variety of formats, from PowerPoint to workshops, and strike a nice balance between effectiveness, cost, and speed. The team replayed the recordings in meetings and workshops with staffers at multiple levels inside the DBA, successfully fostering a sense of professional empathy.

A slightly different approach was used to share the eventual design solution. It was communicated via a ‘design fiction’ video that showed scenarios of use for the new Branchkode. With a simple “before and after” narrative construct, the video could also be communicated in multiple contexts, and worked well alongside the original audio evoking the problem. Like the audio interviews, this video was also produced with help contracted in to ensure a high level of quality.

System map

A visualisation of the network of actors who are involved in providing a service to users or otherwise address their needs.

Such a map can be useful first as a diagnostic tool and later as a guide to help locate the sites of necessary redesign. For diagnostic use, an easy way to get started is to ask people to draw their idea of how the system "should work." Using the example of Branchkode, the assumed map was very direct: a user went to the website, performed a search, found their answer, and the work was done. The map of this looks like a clean straight line with little chance for deviation. MindLab complemented the assumed system map with an experienced one, based on their ethnographic work locating the actual frontline.[12]

In the latter mapping, a different picture emerged. The clean line between user and website is extended to include the failure cases for the service. If and when the site failed to answer the user's needs, they might resort to making a phone call, sending an email or visiting a local office. As the touchpoints multiplied, so too did the opportunities for internal confusion within the government agencies that users were contacting. All of these were captured on the comparative system map, which could then be used to illustrate the variety of gaps in the system and the possibility of a user's case being negatively impacted (or dropped altogether) when the many actors within the system responded in an uncoordinated way.

Within the realm of service design there are numerous ways to represent a system, each with its own nuances. For the purpose of this book the salient point is that drawing out the different touchpoints, actors and relationships involved in a service helps one more rigorously identify (and thus explain) what is not working and exactly *how* it is not working. A system map may be usefully correlated with the story of a user or user type (this is typically referred to as a 'service journey') as well as data on the efficacy of various nodes in the system.

[12] **Find the frontline** > P107

Mascot

Keep your eyes open for prized possessions and curious wrinkles in the system as they usually have a useful story to tell. These objects, behaviours or moments may become the 'mascot' for your future design solutions.

A mascot symbolically stands in for more complex and nuanced observations and ideas. Mascots are not so much things to be simply replaced, but point to the site of useful intervention even if the nature of intervention is still being formulated. They describe a kind of user-centred "vernacular" knowledge production that new systems must improve upon.

MindLab uncovered that staff were using a large binder of classification codes and modifying the binders as they found errors or areas of ambiguity. The binders were kept close-at-hand, almost treasured by staff. As the only constructive element within the Branchekode system, which otherwise had little articulation of the need for improvement, the level of care given to these binders was immediately telling. The system was perceived to be "without an owner", featuring no common awareness of the cost of failure, and so a language of internalised solutions had developed, as physically embodied in these artefacts.

This is the kind of object that often emerges from within a system, in an undesigned fashion, as it usefully codifies the tacit knowledge required to make the official version of the system work better. It became a useful artefact that provided design clues for the new service, but also worked as a tangible sign of the overheads that the ineffective existing system was producing.

Building high quality public services

Case 6
GOV.UK

“If you can book a flight online with a few clicks
and cut through all the associated regulations…
then anything is possible [online].”

Martha Lane Fox

Project goals

Transform the quality of the UK's government digital services, making them "simpler, clearer, faster", starting with a single website for the whole of government.

Theory of change

If services become digital, the government can reduce costs and dramatically raise the quality of user experience at the same time. This is only possible by internalising the design and development of these services, starting with the top 100 user needs and building frameworks for this new approach to spread throughout government.

Success factors and strokes of luck

The role played by the UK government's appointed "Digital Champion," Martha Lane Fox, is key to the early development of GDS as a non-partisan champion; Tom Loosemore, who assisted Lane Fox on her report, and later helped found GDS, was a respected member of the UK internet scene, giving him ready access to a wide network of talent; The timing was right: previous generations of e-Government hype occurred before the internet's commercial successes was able to prove the new development paradigms.

Martha Lane Fox, the UK's then newly-appointed 'Digital Champion', began with a report—a letter, really—in October 2010 criticising the government for its inability to deliver high-quality digital services, despite the explosion of consumer services such as travel booking, shopping, banking, and more.[1] In just ten pages of precise text, she called for "revolution not evolution" and established a clear vision for how this would change the way the UK Government utilises the internet to deliver services to citizens.

[1] See *Directgov and beyond: Revolution, Not Evolution* > L13

Billions had been spent on e-government initiatives in the UK, mostly using large IT companies, but the results were lacklustre[2] and subject to numerous high-profile flops. Beyond basic complaints about delays and budget overruns, these efforts carried out by IT companies tended to have a technology-centric approach, yielding a rigidity that did not match with the dynamism of the political environment or place enough emphasis on user experience. An entirely new approach was called for and Fox's report catalysed the formation of Government Digital Services (GDS), a group within the Cabinet Office, who would use a different approach to achieve superior outcomes. The cabinet office was a natural home for GDS because it is responsible for the 'machinery' of government.

[2] One notable example is the Rural Payments Agency's Single Payment Scheme which was a digital service developed to pay farmers. After an initial estimate of £76M, Final costs for the system ballooned above £350M. The National Audit Office calculated that it cost £1,743 to administer each payment. > L14

GDS was born with the mandate to build a digital layer for government that was so good it could "empower and make life simpler for citizens and, at the same time allow government to turn other things off",[3] saving money in the process. According to Tom Loosemore, Deputy Director, they are inspired by civic infrastructure, such as sewers and roads, as metaphors for their work: "consistency and quality are important," as with any fundamental infrastructure. GDS's goals for the government's online presence were fourfold:

[3] From *Directgov and beyond: Revolution, Not Evolution* > L13

1. **Fix online publishing** of government information by bringing it under a single domain, with a coherent user experience, and a shared publishing platform;
2. **Fix online transactions** with government by focusing on user experience and making digital the default rather than the exception;
3. **Make services more useful** by establishing standards and APIs (technology that allows others to easily incorporate government content and services into third party services and apps);
4. **Strengthen the quality of delivery** by boosting internal technical competencies and cleaning up procurement.

GDS became both the architect and the engine room of government digital service provision, owning the user experience between people and government online (#1 & #2) as well as possessing the technical prowess to go beyond specifications, leading the way by actually building core parts of the technology (#3 & #4). Bringing the actual production in-house was a critical point of difference compared to standard approach of outsourcing IT to major consultancies and IT service providers. At one point in the initial research, GDS inquired as to "where work on [a particular site] was being done" and none of the clients knew. It had been outsourced, it turned out, to France. While this was not a problem in and of itself, the fact that no one knew where the work was done indicated the level of attention it was being given. Bringing technical development in-house would have been impossible under previous staffing circumstances, so the makeup of the new GDS team was specifically designed to have technical competence on staff. It meant ownership of the means of production, which enabled a new level of strategic oversight as well as increased care and attention for its primary interface with the public.

Although this level of internalisation sounded risky to some, the team were able to point to big, mainstream successes like Amazon, Twitter and Facebook and say "we're building it in the same way that they do it."[4] With technology at the core of their business, they build it themselves. Such game-changing businesses can no longer be dismissed as flaky, unprofessional startups—they are resilient, secure, scalable and responsive. They are also rapidly built, and iterated continually through internal design and code teams, which is a quite different practise and culture to that purveyed by the IT consultancy sector. While not every politician or public servant is actively using social media themselves, most have had some experience with Amazon.com by now, which made the argument convincing in both pragmatic and familiar terms. Whereas IT had become a specialised profession and therefore difficult to procure, using analogies to popular websites helped people understand what they are procuring and why higher quality standards required a new approach.

To attain the quality of some of the best private sites on the web, GDS would need to attract the best talent. Key GDS leadership leaned on their networks and high profile within the UK technology community to carefully and consciously build a positive brand around the effort.[5] This was care-

[4] **Compete with the best** > P124

[5] **Rebrand public service** > P123

[5] Designer of many of the road signs in the UK as well as the typography used on the British railways.

[7] Known for his work on Intercity trains as well as the iconographic London TX1 Taxicab.

[8] Quoted from an interview with Ben Terrett on ItsNice-That.com > L21

[9] Snowplough > P125

fully constructed to harken back to the work of legendary British designers including Margaret Calvert[6] and Kenneth Grange,[7] both of whom were responsible for iconographic yet everyday aspects of the British experience. In the words of Ben Terrett, Head of Design:

> "I really want for us to become a place where young people want to come straight from college, attracted by the scale of the thing–there's not many challenges of this size in this world–there's also the mission to make peoples lives better."[8]

The result of this effort was the creation of a group that looks and acts like a startup but is actually a unit within the Cabinet Office. Leadership often found themselves playing the role of 'snowplough'[9] running ahead of the team to tackle procedural roadblocks and clear the way for the rest to do their work with minimal distraction. This approach was necessary because of the nature of the contemporary web development process that GDS were employing, which was different from the way that IT had been handled within the government previously. Like many startups, the team applied an agile development process paired with user-centred design, meaning that they work in a collaborative, multidisciplinary fashion. This allows them to structure their work into a series of iterative 'sprints', each achieving incremental development goals in weeks rather than months. Using an infrastructural metaphor, the linear development process employed previously can be likened to building a road through a jungle inch by inch: it's not useful until per cent complete. The agile process is more like building the road up in layers: as soon as the first layer of gravel is down, it is useful, and things only get better as successive layers improve the quality of the driving surface.

With an intenttion to "get stuff done" straight off the blocks, GDS chose an audaciously simple project as their starting point: create a single website for all of the UK Government. What came to be known as GOV.UK replaced hundreds of varied websites each with their own problems of ease of use and maintenance, due to the variety of systems employed. The starting point was "fixing publishing" which meant bringing informational content under one domain name, upgrading the user experience, and building behind-the-scenes systems to make maintenance easier for government staff.

Still, "all of the UK government" represents an enormous amount of content, so GDS turned to data analysis to identify the top 100 user needs which became the priorities for development. This was aided by ten years of logs automatically generated from the government web servers describing which pages people were visiting most frequently, as well as what they were actually looking for. Following industry standard practises from the technology community, GDS developed and launched a public 'alpha' version of the GOV.UK site on May 10, 2011 that was live for two months. The alpha approach gave GDS the "freedom to do things we know we'll have to roll back from," according to Loosemore, "so let's not waste the opportunity." It was developed in 12 weeks on a budget of £261,000 (approximately €310,000). Embracing a level of candour that has become a hallmark of GDS' effort, the alpha concluded with a blog post by Loosemore detailing the top ten problems, praise and ideas that were gathered as user feedback during the alpha.

Based on feedback from the public alpha as well as further iteration, the team released a beta[10] on February 1, 2012, continued to iterate in public, and launched the official site eight months later on October 17. The site is in its first year of operation, making exact figures scarce but Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office, expects GOV.UK to yield yearly savings of £70M.[11] Improvements to the quality of the site can be judged by assessing the usability of the new site in comparison to one of the many it replaced. In one test GOV.UK was 40 per cent faster based on observed user testing.[12] Another indicator of the popular success of the project is the fact that it won the Design of the Year award from the London Design Museum in 2013, beating out such stiff competition as the Olympic Torch.

Crucial to the success of the new site has been a determined focus on user needs. As GDS CTO Liam Maxwell puts it, "people don't really care about which department delivers a service; they want the service from government."[13] These words were borne out in practise when GDS were able to organise the site around terminology that citizens might use in their everyday life (driving, tax, housing) rather than the names of ministries or departments that happen to take care of the matter. This is important on an immediate timeline because it translates the site into everyday language, but is important over the long run because it means the URLs for various services will be stable even as successive governments potentially adjust the names of the departments owning them. Other substantive changes were more a matter of catching up to industry best practises, such as redesigning the

[10] **Public beta** > P128

[11] **From a speech on 1 November 2012.** > L15

[12] **See "Government services go 'digital by default' to save almost £3bn" in *The Guardian Online* on 6 November 2012.** > L16

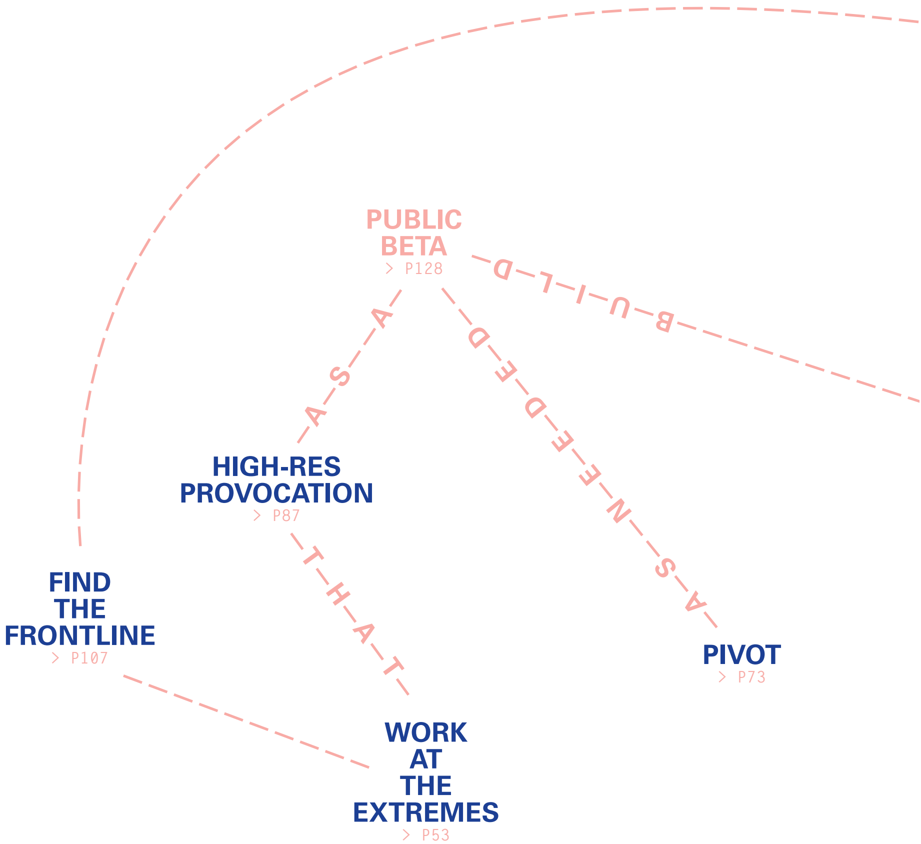
[13] **Quoted from "Liam Maxwell: user need underpins the government's digital-by-default strategy" in *The Guardian Online* on 14 November 2012.** > L17

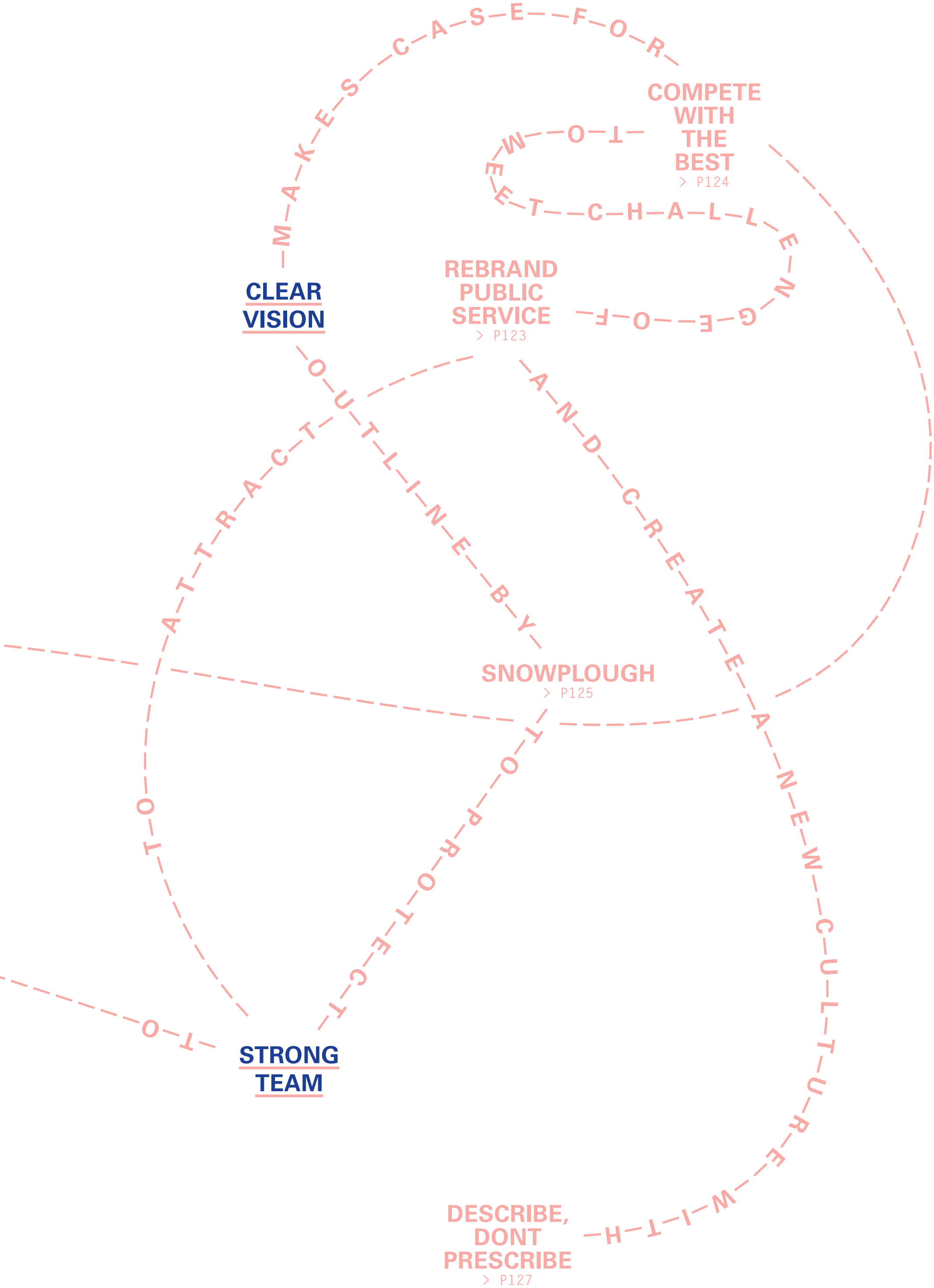
layout of all pages to help orient users who enter the site via a 'deep link' rather than starting on the homepage.

The agile approach used by GDS is not a product that one can purchase or something that can be bolted on to a linear development approach. It is a significantly different approach that has to be cultivated, lived with and practised.[14] It must be absorbed within the organization, rather than procured. Because of this, the future of GDS' work will depend on their ability to expand the particular culture they have built to other parts of Government as well. With only 150 people, GDS are conscious that they will not be able to rebuild everything themselves, so they are careful to make following their lead the "path of least resistance" for others. This includes maintaining clear, legible and public design principles;[15] building core technical components that are reusable across all websites (such as log-in systems); as well as working to define more effective technology procurement procedures within government.

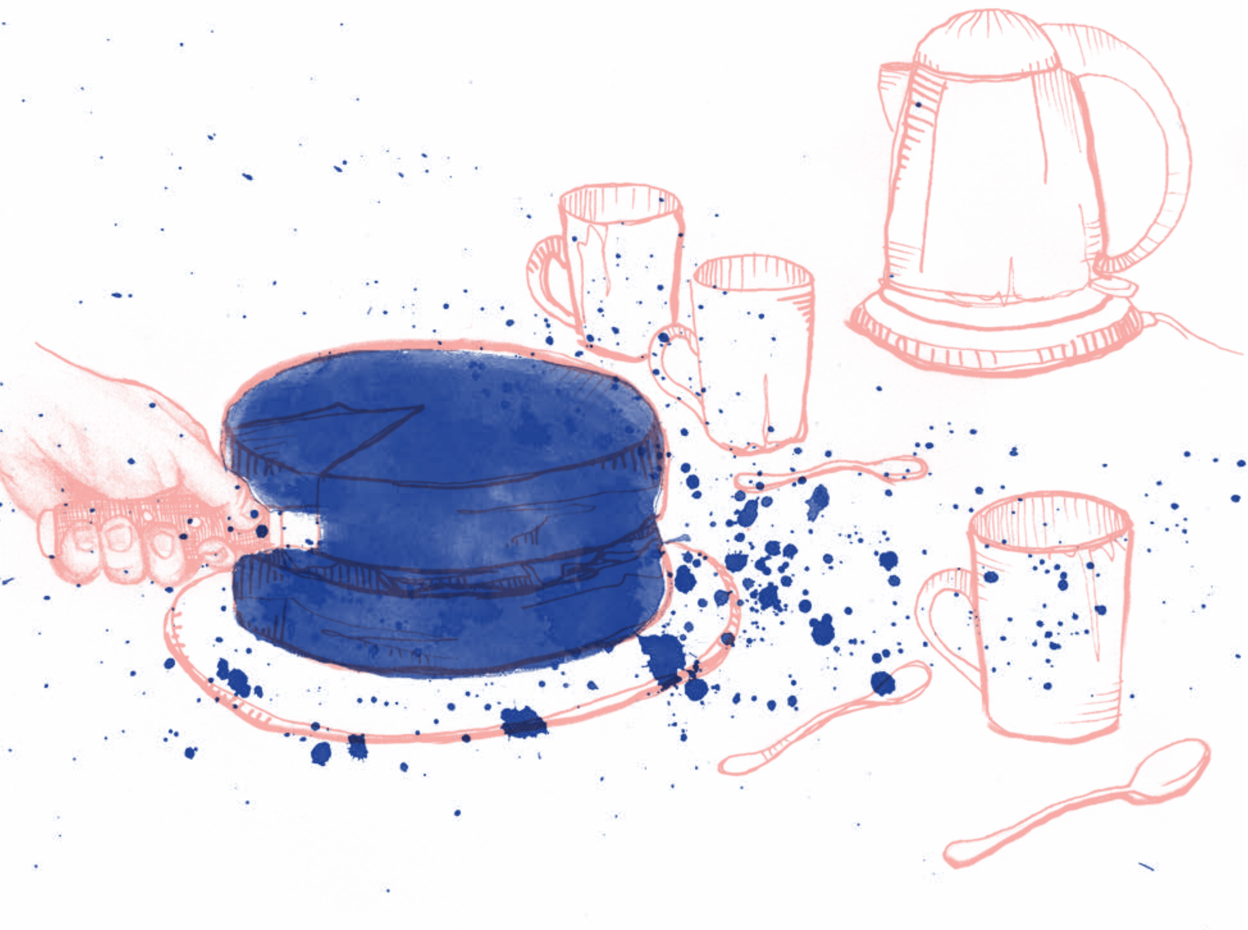
[14] **Describe, don't prescribe** > P127

[15] **GDS' Design Principles are available online** > L18





CLEAR VISION
MAKES CASE FOR
COMPETE WITH THE BEST
> P124
TO MEET CHALLENGE OF
REBRAND PUBLIC SERVICE
> P123
OUTLINE BY
SNOWPLOUGH
> P125
AND CREATE A NEW CULTURE WITH
DESCRIBE, DONT PRESCRIBE
> P127
TO ATTRACT
TO PROTECT
TO
STRONG TEAM



Rebrand public service

To make it easier to build a high-quality team and produce high quality work, start by changing the tone of the expectations about what it is to work in government. Rebrand your corner of public service as a place not only to get things done, but to get important, meaningful things done that serve the public interest.

For GDS this started with things like seeking office space that was purposefully a bit further afield than the core of the Cabinet Office. While the space they inhabit is nothing special, being distant allowed them to look and act like what they truly were: a startup embedded within government. Soon the walls were covered with print-outs and evidence of their ongoing work, as in any startup's offices. Events were important too. They organised and participated in hackdays, bootcamps, and unconferences to both advance their own abilities, but more importantly to show a different idea about what it is like to work for government, concretely demonstrating that government and top-notch technology are not mutually exclusive.

An aura around the work has also been generated by frequent, open and accessible communications direct from the team. Blogging publicly around GDS's work not only helps communicate what is going on, but the way that it is going on, and the culture that is emerging at GDS. While common to the tech scene, this is less common in government, with its tradition of controlled communications. Details matter too. Rather than subsuming individual voices into a single official account that makes all blog posts, and the inevitable anonymity that comes from such an approach, the GDS blog posts are attributed to individuals and communicates who they truly are: a varied team who have a single, unified goal.

Especially amongst a team with diverse backgrounds, tiny rituals are important too as they help establish and reinforce a new, shared culture. As GDS is a British operation, cake features on a regular basis. With no official budget for such purchases, the cake is personally contributed by a different team member each week. Acts such as this, although superfluous on the surface, help bind a new team together. While cake was just the thing for GDS, other teams in other contexts will find their own meaningful rituals that implicitly embed a playful sense of tradition at the core of the work.

Combined, these and other acts generate a positive halo around the work which leads to higher-quality recruits, which in turn creates a virtuous cycle of producing higher-quality work, attracting higher-calibre recruits, and so on. Although this cycle can exist without working and communicating in an open manner, it is accelerated by being more open, accessible and legible.

Compete with the best

See the best of breed as your competition, regardless of who created it. This recognises that people today have far more options available to them than ever before, and what they use "in the rest of their life" is setting their expectations for the quality of service they should receive from their government as well.

For instance, public hospitals are increasingly perceived through the lens of expectations set by private health services such as optometry and dentistry, which citizens are accessing on the private markets, even if their core health services are publicly provided. Therefore services, and particularly online services, find themselves being compared to standards that are set by unexpected sources. While the means and motivations behind GOV.UK may be quite different to Facebook, for example, basic standards for ease of use, effectiveness, and functionality are being set by such privately-operated websites due to the central role they play in our lives.

Governments are not always used to 'competing' in this way, but the reality is that it can be easier to find a piece of government information starting from Google than it is starting from most governments' own websites. GDS recognise this in one of the design principles for their alpha release: "Google is the Homepage". Rather than pretend that they would convince users to eschew Google and always start at the GOV.UK homepage, they purposefully designed the site to orient users who arrive via a 'deep link' (a page that is nestled within the hierarchy of the website).

By recognising the reality of the competitive environment, GDS was spurred to provide higher-quality services by coming to terms with the exceptionally high performance of other players in the field, rather than dwelling on the underperformance of the status quo. Doing so helped establish a subtle rivalry ("can we be better than them?") and set up a clear goal to be bested. Having a clear sense of the competition allows one to judge the scale of change that is necessary to compete at a high level—is this a difference of shades or does it entail radical transformation?

For GDS, recognising the competition was not only an incentive to deliver better outcomes, but was also useful in identifying and building the case for a different way of delivery. GDS put the slow, costly and cumbersome approaches of the IT companies, consultants and departments into contrast with the contemporary approaches of leading websites such as Facebook, Amazon and Google. This helped GDS win the permission and freedom to adopt newer, more agile approaches that led to better outcomes at lower cost.

Snowplough

An individual, usually in a leadership role, who works ahead of (or above) the core project team to proactively clear organisational obstacles out of the way. When done well, the person playing the role of snowplough bears the brunt of engaging bureaucratic issues before they become a drag on the momentum of the core project team.

In the case of GDS this can be seen at multiple levels. Martha Lane Fox's significant position paper cleared a wide swathe through previous UK government attempts at unifying and improving government services online, which made room for GDS to exist in the first place. Leadership within the team was selected in part for their ability to anticipate and take on the internal machinery of the bureaucracy, including an experienced chief executive, Mike Bracken, whose time at The Guardian prepared him to manage complex stakeholder relationships. And Tom Loosemore often found himself working as a "snowplough" for the development team at critical moments on an operational scale.

A specific example of snowploughing within GDS involves Loosemore taking on the procedural challenges to secure his development team's preferred equipment. They wanted Apple Macbooks because this was the platform they felt most comfortable using for rapid development, which would be essential to meet GDS' ambitious timelines as an organisation. Indeed, Apple's operating system was the industry standard for such work, but much like the way IT groups within government had used antiquated approaches to building websites in the past, government IT was also hung up on the notion that Macs were expensive and frivolous. The financial case came together rather quickly, showing that the total cost of the Macs ownership was actually cheaper than the PC equivalents because the developers would provide their own technical support. While the rationale was quick to come by, Loosemore still had to snowplough carefully and deliberately through internal decision-making to ensure that his team would receive the equipment they needed.

This anecdote about Macs as well as the stories hinted at above are examples of preserving momentum within the project. In each instance, the snowplough invests time and energy up front to settle issues which may seem relatively unimportant in the moment, but will enable a more effective way of working in the future. In that sense, time spent in the snowplough role is an investment in the future success of an initiative. While some form of "top cover" is probably always necessary to create space for a different way of working, in the case of GDS, when the change has been relatively radical, rapid and open, this has been essential.


USE
72PT
FONTS OR LARGER

Describe instead of prescribe

When establishing a new set of standards within an organisation, communicating the goals in a descriptive manner rather than narrowly prescribing a specific approach leaves room for interpretation and acknowledges the potential for further innovation.

Because GDS knew that they would have to both execute their work differently than previous failed attempts at IT reform as well as clearly communicate its difference, the tools and methods of communication came under scrutiny too. Almost without thinking, organisations often produce PowerPoint templates in an attempt to stay "on brand", without really assessing what this prescriptive mode of communications implies. GDS Creative Director, Russell Davies, took a different tack and created a PowerPoint file that contains nothing more than a very basic set of guidelines on "how to give a presentation at GDS." By giving staff the freedom to build their own presentations this gesture moved the emphasis from visual consistency to more important aspects such as clearly articulating the point, being succinct and doing both in a structured way. The goal was to be consistent without going so far as to be absolutely uniform.[16]

Staff experienced this through guidelines such as "no font smaller than 72pt" and "use seven words per line or less" that may have seemed to be aesthetically motivated. On the contrary, the genesis of such instructions was to push GDS staff out of the default mode of jamming as much text as possible into a PowerPoint slide. Although this non-template approach may be frustrating at times because it forces users to think more carefully about exactly what they are trying to communicate, that is exactly the point. Time should be spent on honing the ideas rather than fussing or fighting with an overly rigid template. Davies' framework strips away the tricks and flashy formatting that might distract from the potency of the content in an effort to make the ideas as clear and transmissible as possible. Given that GDS was a young organisation when the guidelines were first produced, this approach was a clever way of anticipating the challenge of maintaining the culture as GDS grew quickly.

GDS use a similar approach to the design of GOV.UK by maintaining a set of design principles that have been publically available since the launch of the alpha version of the site. These have been revisited and refined over time as the team learn more about what works and what does not, but the principles and the fact that they are shared publicly, "set out some rules to guide our thinking and to keep us honest."[17]

[16] **See Richard Pope's post, "A few design rules for Alpha.gov.uk," on the GDS blog** > L19

[17] **Ibid.**

Public beta

Make services available to the public before they are fully refined and use this beta period as a way of collecting feedback to further refine the project.

As a term borrowed from software development, 'beta' typically refers to the second of three major steps along the timeline that brings software to life. Alpha is the first usable version, though it may not represent the whole of the proposed software's functionality; beta is the second major iteration which has full functionality though it may still have bugs, and both are followed by the release or final version. These phases are used for testing and iteration. With the widespread usage of the web, it has become common for companies to beta test their services in public. Nearly every consumer-facing web project these days launches in a public beta first, which makes the service available to self-selecting users early on in exchange for their feedback on its functionality and performance. As the cost of production drops, it is increasingly common for other services and products to be tested in a public fashion.

Publicly iterating a service such as GOV.UK communicates that it is a new thing and therefore involves some risk that it will not work perfectly all of the time. By developing the alpha and beta in parallel to the preexisting sites that were to be replaced, GDS were able to free up space for innovation in a context that would otherwise be very risk adverse. Adopting the "ethic" of public beta[18] suggests that user feedback is vital, and that risk will be dealt with by mitigating failure scenarios rather than pretending that they can be avoided in all cases, all of the time.

Launching with a public beta helps manage expectations by offering fair warning that kinks are still being worked out and that failures will be responded to quickly. Clearly marking something as under development serves as an invitation for users to offer their feedback and commentary on what works and what needs improvement, though it does put the onus on the host of the service to make feedback as easy and seamless as possible for users.

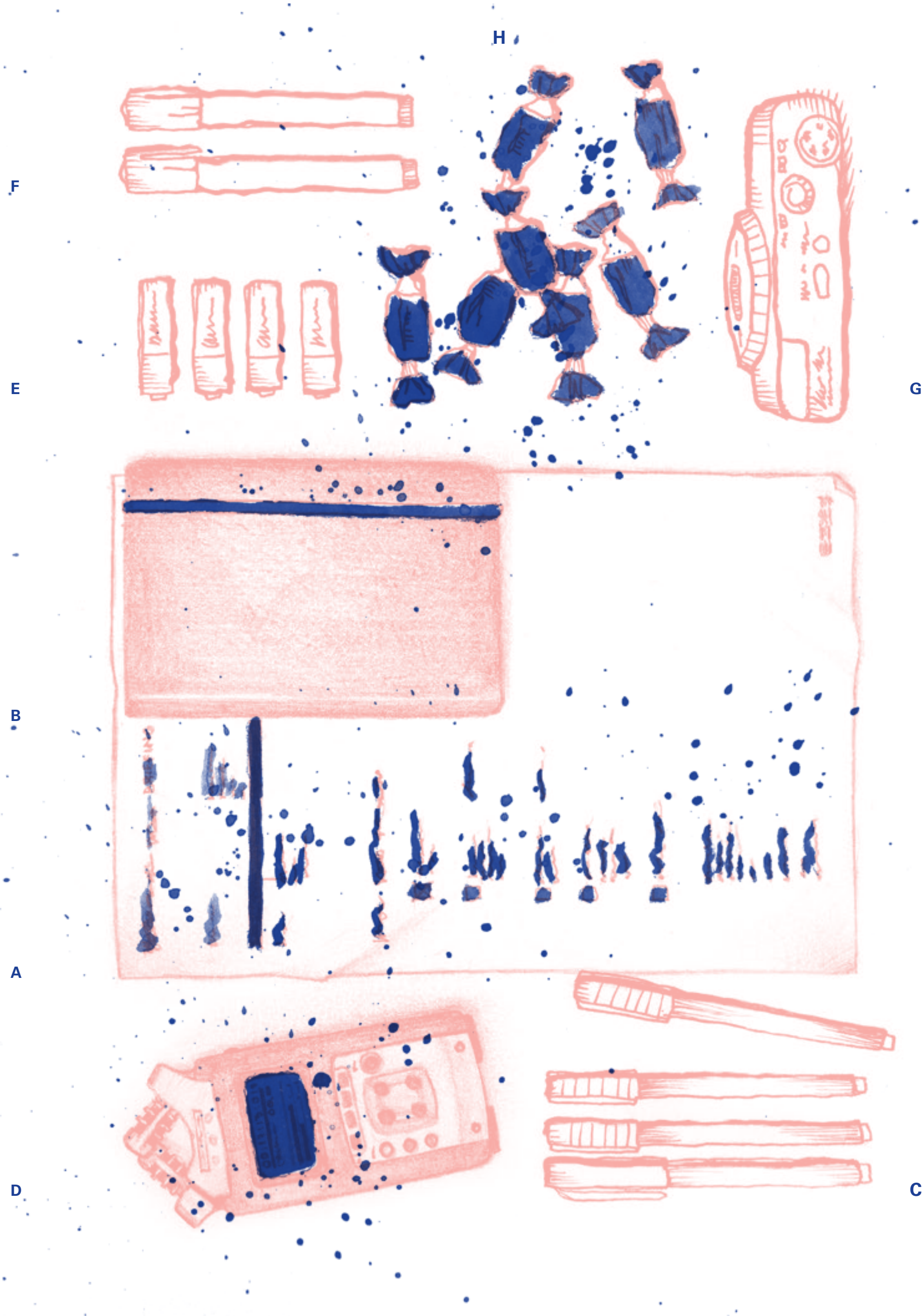
Feedback to a public beta inevitably includes complaints about what is not working (that's the point) but they can also yield compliments and encouragement, which helps keep up morale among an innovative team who may feel somewhat lonely (and occasionally crazy) working against the status quo. Ben Terrett reflected on the positive response to GDS' public alpha and the design principles that underpin it:

"We get things out as quickly as we can—rather than just debate it in the office we want to see what people make of it. The response has been really positive. The nicest thing people have said is that they would not expect something like this from the Government. People have also said they're good ideas for anything, not just websites."[19]

[18] **This builds on ideas set out by Laura Bunt in a blog post entitled, "Designing beta public service: Finding the courage to be imperfect," on the Nesta website** > L20

[19] **Quoted from, "An interview with Ben Terrett about the Government's digital design principles," on ItsNiceThat.com** > L21

Appendix



A. Briefing document (also sent in advance to participants)
B. Notebook
C. Ample supply of pens
D. Audio recorder
E. Backup batteries
F. Whiteboard markers
G. Camera
H. Snacks (we prefer Fazer Sininen chocolates, a Finnish classic)

Three-party interview

"When art critics get together they talk about Form and Structure and Meaning. When artists get together they talk about where you can buy cheap turpentine." Pablo Picasso

When we began the case studies presented in this book, we faced the task of scheduling six different sessions with very busy groups of people. We thus elected to merge the sessions into a series of three 3-party meetings that each brought together two project teams with us as the hosts. Calendaring was an unenviable task in the short term, but this approach yielded benefits over the long run.

It was a calculated bet that experimenting with the format of our research would achieve two things at once. First, this format would meet the basic requirement of giving us the time we needed with the teams to learn about and discuss their projects. Second, by virtue of bringing two teams together, we hoped to foster new connections between innovative practises that might not otherwise meet. Our hunch was that having practitioners interview other practitioners would take the conversation to a greater depth. People who have *been there and done that* know the hard questions. We would gain by having extra brain power in the room, and the teams would gain by virtue of being exposed to alternative practises.

Comments along the lines of, "I'm glad you forced us to step back and articulate what we've been doing" concluded each of the sessions. The cumulative output of these meetings was well over one hundred pages of notes, hours of audio recordings, and enough insights to fill a book.

New York
July 20

Alejandro Aravena
Rodrigo Araya
Alexander Gorlin
Rosanne Haggerty
Corinne LeTourneau
Gerald Thomas
David Cappo (via Skype)
—
Bryan Boyer
Justin Cook

London
August 16-17

Katy Bentham
Hailey Brewer
Philip Colligan
John Craig
Melani Oliver
Suzy Stone
—
Bryan Boyer
Marco Steinberg

Copenhagen
September 3-4

Christian Bason
Russell Davies
Niels Hansen
Tom Loosemore
Runa Sabroe
—
Bryan Boyer
Dan Hill

Selection

We consciously invited a diverse group from four countries, with quite different remits, and different challenges. As a comparative study of innovation practises we sought diversity because we wanted to be able to see the distinctions more clearly. This way, overlaps would be on points of practise rather than on solutions.

With that in mind, we invited teams who are leaders in their field and have an outspoken interest in reflexive practise. Working with the teams over a couple of months, we narrowed in on one specific project from each. Stemming from a desire to put the focus on craft, we were fairly agnostic towards the content of the cases. Instead, the main criterion for selecting the right project was that it must have a clear starting point while implicating change at a larger scale.

Pairing

The risk inherent to this approach was that the pairs might not find common ground. In actuality, we discovered that the pairings shared much in their methods and tools, even when they were focused on different problems. With only three pairs, we took a bespoke approach to matching them up, and each of the pairings had its own logic. For instance, Brownsville and Constitución were a natural grouping due to their concern with urban form, even though the contexts are dramatically different. Similarly, CFPB and Creative Councils are each efforts to build innovation capability within institutions, though the approaches and the makeup of the teams involved are quite distinct.

To collide different ways of thinking (again part of the comparative drive) we also took care to bring together groups who did not know each other already. Within the group of six some teams already had strong relationships, so our basic rule of thumb was that the teams should be meeting each other for the first time.

Scale

The sessions were structured around a notion of scale, and we sought to understand both the macro (1:1000) and micro (1:1) levels. On average it took 1-2 hours to tell the macro story in a conversational setting with lots questions back and forth. Five Ws were the focus here:

— Who/Team: How did you design the team in terms of competencies present? How did you recruit?
— What/Scope: How did you decide what's in and what's out of the project? How did you select the 'vehicle'?
— Where/Scale: How did you plan for scale? Have you begun to scale? If so, how?
— When/Measures: How do you evaluate progress and know when you are successful?
— Why/Mission: Why wasn't it OK to use 'business as usual' approaches to meet the needs you are trying to address? Does your project have near-term goals? What about long term goals related to change/capability building within the host organisation or society at large?

Next we looked at pivot points within each project. Moments such as a change in scope, securing important buy-in, discovering a key insight, prototyping an assumption, or dealing with an external event were proposed as the kinds of thing that would be useful to understand in more depth. Although teams did prepare their thoughts before the meetings, we found that the 1:1000 storytelling also opened up numerous other potential points of practise to focus on.

Artefacts

We encouraged teams to bring artefacts from their process and to use those artefacts to illustrate their story as much as possible. This helped different groups understand each other better by making things more concrete. When IDEO referred to “high-res provocations”, for instance, it was useful to have examples that made it easier for the rest of us to see what they mean by “high-res”. Artefacts ranged from internal documents, PowerPoints, photos from events, and even an architectural model carried in its own suitcase.

Time

Each of these meetings lasted 1.5 days, allowing enough time to swim in the details. On average it took 1-2 hours to tell the macro 1:1000 story in a conversational setting with lots questions back and forth, and we spent up to an hour on each of the 1:1 moments. More than the sheer quantity of time, however, having the session break into two days created a useful mental break. The schedule allowed for a full day while retaining enough time for a leisurely lunch and a handful of breaks. As always, we invited our guests to dinner at the end of the first day and this proved to be a helpful time to get to know each other better.

Hosting

The role of the host in these meetings is to convene the sessions and to provide a framework for discussion. As much as possible, we let the teams interview each other based on the framework of 1:1000 and 1:1 scales, chiming in when needed to ask a clarifying question or to offer a comparative example. We often played timekeeper, but found ourselves abandoning the prepared schedule as often as we adhered to it. In practise this meant that we ended up getting to fewer of the 1:1 moments than we anticipated, but it was a conscious decision made in favour of quality over quantity.

Thank you

This study would not have been possible without an ethos of trust, collaboration, and collegiate debate. While it is the authors' responsibility to place words on the page, the insights that inspire them and the people who share those insights deserve much of the credit. In this last regard we have been especially lucky to learn from the best.

Without the participation of the case study teams, there would literally be no book. We are deeply grateful for the participation of David Cappo, Alexander Gorlin, Rosanne Haggerty, Rasmia Kirmani-Frye, Corinne LeTourneau and Gerald Thomas on the Brownsville Partnership case; Alejandro Aravena, Rodrigo Araya and Juan Ignacio Cerda on the rebuilding of Constitución; Russell Davies and Tom Loosemore on Government Digital Services; Hailey Brewer, Fred Dust and Suzy Stone on the CFPB case; Runa Sabroe, Niels Hansen and Christian Bason on MindLab's work with Branchekode; Katy Bentham, Philip Colligan, John Craig and Melani Oliver on Creative Councils.

In the middle of this process our colleague Dan Hill migrated south to become CEO of Fabrica. His influence is still here, in the ideas and the text. Indeed, many of the things we cover evolved during long and lively debate among Sitra's Strategic Design Unit, of which Dan was an essential part.

In October 2012 we had the good fortune to be joined by Ignacio Farias, Jaana Hyvärinen, Sara Ikävalko, Katri Lehtonen, Robert Plitt, Even Westvang and Dimitri Zenghelis (in addition to the case teams) as we took some of these ideas for a walk. Separate discussions with Landon Brown, Laura Bunt, Jesper Christensen, Tim Draimin, Al Etmanski, Stephen Huddart, Jenna Sutela, and John Thackara also sharpened our thinking.

We are deeply grateful towards the people who were instrumental in the refinement and production of this document, all on a razor-thin deadline. Martti Kalliala kept our lingo in check. Satsuko VanAntwerp brought us down to earth. Laura Lee Lewis squashed logical inconsistencies. Lucia Walter for adding a touch of hand craft. Martin Lorenz & Lupi Asensio of TwoPoints made it beautiful and intelligent—as always.

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About Sitra

Sitra is an independent fund operating under the supervision of the Finnish Parliament, which seeks to promote stable and balanced development in Finland, qualitative and quantitative growth of the economy, and international competitiveness and cooperation. Our operations are funded out of the returns from our endowment capital and business funding.

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sitra.fi

About Helsinki Design Lab

Helsinki Design Lab was an initiative by Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund that was most recently active during the years 2008-2013, though HDL's roots stretch back to 1968.

Governments and other public institutions face tremendous transformation challenges to maintain effectiveness in the future. Today we see the need to redesign the context and conditions under which decisions are made to, in effect, create a new culture of public decision-making. This includes redesigning both the boundaries of complex problems and the ways that institutions deliver solutions. Helsinki Design Lab was Sitra's platform for understanding, experimenting, and reflecting upon the new practises of design that this sea-change implies. As of June 2013 it is in hibernation.

helsinkidesignlab.org

About the authors

Bryan Boyer

Bryan advises companies and governments on the design and stewardship of innovative development initiatives. At Sitra his main project was Helsinki Design Lab, an internationally recognized platform for strategic design and social innovation. Previously Bryan has worked as an entrepreneur and programmer in silicon valley and as a freelance architect. He holds a Master of Architecture degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design.

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Justin is Sitra's academic liaison for the US and serves as the organization's Sustainable Development Lead. He helped design and build the Low2No Sustainable Urban Development initiative and manage its implementation. He serves as Helsinki Design Lab's expert on energy, carbon and sustainability. Currently he is helping Sitra better align its endowment with its mission by developing ways to place capital in businesses, projects and funds that generate measurable social and environmental impact together with financial return. He holds a Master of Architecture degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Washington.

Marco Steinberg

Marco directs Sitra's internal strategic design efforts, charting new forward-oriented opportunities to help Sitra meet its mission of enhancing Finland's national innovation ability and well being. In addition to Helsinki Design Lab he is responsible for the Design Exchange Programme, an initiative to embed designers within public sector organizations, as well as the concept and design-development of Low2No, a transitional strategy to create carbon free urban development nationwide in Finland.

Marco is currently the Chairman of the Board of the Museum of Finnish Architecture & serves as advisor to many organizations. His previously experiences include: Professor at the Harvard Design School (1999-2009); advising governments on SME & design funding strategies; and his own design & architecture practise. He received a BFA and BArch from Rhode Island School of Design and an MArch with Distinction from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Legible Practises
Six stories about the craft of stewardship

Bryan Boyer,
Justin W. Cook &
Marco Steinberg

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The book you are holding was designed to have plenty of space for making notes. We hope you write, draw and mark at will.

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Stewardship is the art of aligning decisions with impact when many minds are involved in making a plan, and many hands in enacting it.

This notion of stewardship comes to life through the stories of six projects, each an example of carefully rewiring institutions to better meet today’s challenges.

By zooming in on the details, a handful of practises emerge that will help you convert ideas into action.