ThoughtWorks®

TOOLKIT

ACTIONABLE INNOVATION

An Innovation Inception Model Based on experiences in dealing with the most common risks of innovation failure.

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Contents

INNOVATION IS NOT MAGIC

While innovation is not achieved by following the steps used in traditional projects... it is not based in magic either. It is a craft, and as with any craft, there are fundamentals to help lead to success.

ThoughtWorks and others have identified risks to an innovator's journey. In a very real sense, being successful at innovation requires an understanding of the identified risks and the ability to deal with them.

In the following pages each risk will be identified and defined. The risks will then be analyzed, and suggestions on mitigation will be given. There will be a sample activity that has been designed to deal with the challenges associated with each risk. There are many possible activities that could be used. Each activity included has been designed to be highly collaborative, focuses on concrete outputs, and builds on or from surrounding activities.

RISKS ARE GROUPED IN THREE AREAS

"THE PROBLEM"

Difficulties when an innovation begins without clear insight.

"THE SOLUTION"

Mistakes in designing solutions.

"ACTION"

Pitfalls associated with executing a innovation in an uncertain environment.

Risks to successful innovation that involve identifying

THE PROBLEM

"If I had only one hour to save the world, I would spend fifty-five minutes defining the problem, and only five minutes finding the solution."

- Albert Einstein

Risk #1

Ideas Without User

What this risk looks like

Innovation in a Vacuum.

Len has a really exciting idea. He can't talk about anything else (just ask his wife and co-workers). His idea leverages new technology and he's even had some bloggers write articles about his creative work. Everyone agrees the idea is amazing, but when he's finished, no one lines up to use it. It's bright, shiny and unused.

The root of the problem

Rushing to a solution.

The goal of this step is to avoid creating an innovation that has no natural user. Innovators get excited about things they can do and become dazzled by the splendor of their own creation. When someone has an idea, it is only human nature to rush forward to a solution. People often move deep into the creative process with only the vaguest idea of who will use their invention.

Mitigating the risk

Start the innovation process in a different place.

Instead of focusing on an solution, start by looking at potential users. Think broadly about who we might help with innovation. Set aside readymade answers and look at the world of people you could serve. Think of this as a menu of people whose lives you might make better.

STAKEHOLDER MAP

Activity Goal
Create a common understanding of who are the people involved/affected within the field or space where we are trying to innovate in.

Suggested Time to Complete
15-30 minutes

Group or Individual Activity
This is a group activity. Ideally you want from 3 to 5 people.

Facilitator Notes
Encourage participants to add as many stakeholders as they can think of. If you see someone writing down things that are too broad like "partners", encourage them to think more specifically (example: what kind of partners?).

What will the participants be doing
Participants should start by capturing on post-its, as a team, the players involved in the specific space or field they are focusing on. Everyone in the team should be placing their post-its on the blank piece of paper at the center of the table. Ask participants to start clustering similar stakeholders.

Activity Example

Risk #2

Solving Non-existant Problems

What this risk looks like

Not our problem.

Siri is working with her local community to adopt a new program that was developed back at head quarters, 10,000 miles away. It's what people sitting in home office imagine her clients need ... not a problem they actually need solved. The innovation that only highlights the lack of insight they have into the real lives of the people they are trying to serve.

The root of the problem

Designing without insight.

The goal of this step is to avoid solving a non-existent problem. Most people make easy assumptions and generalizations about other people's lives. They rely on broad preconceptions to drive the direction of an innovation. What results is a solution that is disconnected from a real person's needs.

Mitigating the risk

A detailed view of an individual.

Take a person from the prior step and create a detailed view of them as an individual. Work to see them as a real person. Stop being abstract. Flesh out a picture of the life they live, developing a rich detailed view that enables the empathetic parts of your mind to participate in the creative process. Identify a problem that matters, based on insight into a real person's life.

PERSONAS

Activity Goal
To build empathy and a better, more detailed understanding of specific persons within your scope.

Suggested Time to Complete
20-30 minutes

Group or Individual Activity
Ideally this exercise should be done in pairs. Create as many personas as possible for the team (aim for 4-5).

Facilitator Notes
Encourage participants to name their persona and think through the lens of that person. They should be looking at specifics like age, gender, role, country, etc.

What will the participants be doing
Participants start by choosing which stakeholder they want to focus on. Then create a profile for the person using the framework. When participants complete one, ask them to work on additional personas.

Activity Example

(Persona Profile) Templates attached at end of toolkit.

USER JOURNEY

Activity Goal
Create a common understanding of who the people involved/affected are within the field or space participants are trying to innovate in.

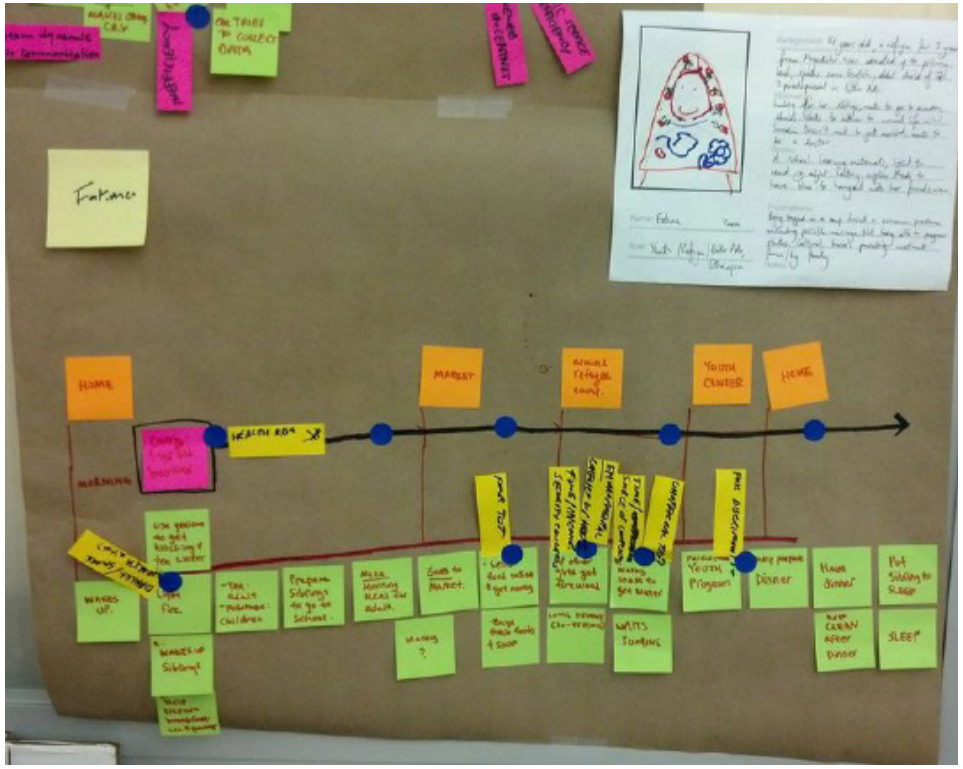
Suggested Time to Complete
20-40 minutes

Group or Individual Activity
This is a group activity. Ideally you would want from 3 to 5 people.

Facilitator Notes
Encourage participants to fill all the gaps in their end to end journey.

What will the participants be doing
Ask each group to map on a timeline "a day in the life" (or any other relevant journey) of the persona they chose. Once participants are complete, using 2 different color stickers or post-its, groups should identify things that work and things that are broken in the user journey. If there is time in the end they can do multiple journeys.

Activity Example



This activity can be done on any large piece of paper. Just draw a line across the paper (symbolizing a timeline) and have post-its in hand for the group to participate.

FRAMING PROBLEMS AND PROMISES

Activity Goal

Relate problems to specific personas and phrase the disruptive promise that will lead into a relevant solution.

Suggested Time to Complete

15-20 minutes

Group or Individual Activity

Ideally everyone does at least one problem.

Facilitator Notes

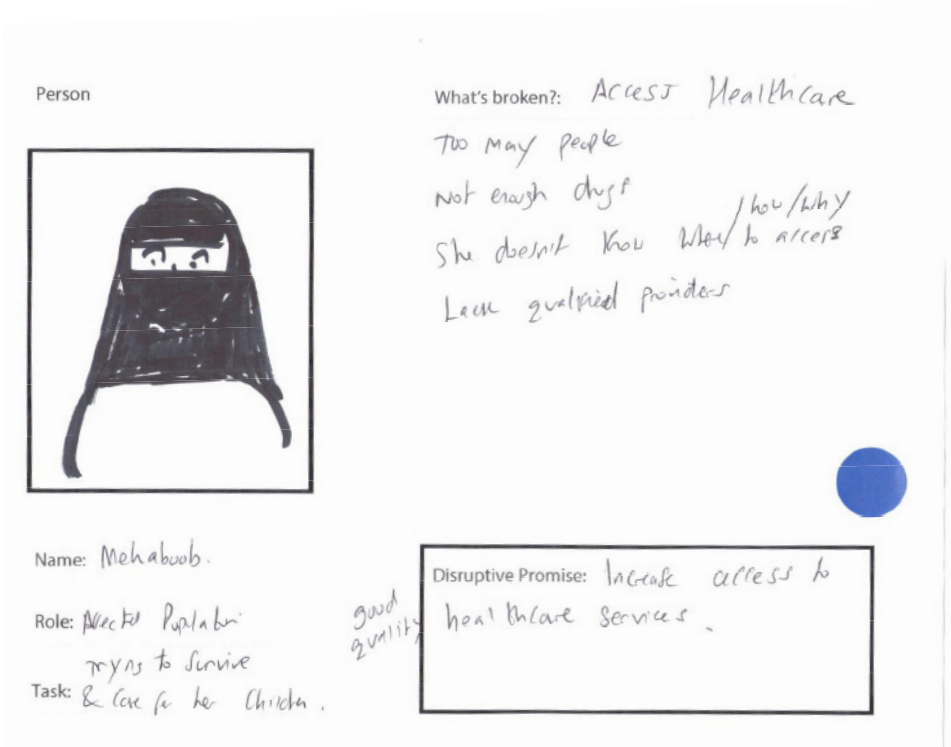
Encourage participants to create promises not solutions.

What will the participants be doing

Each group should take the problems identified in the user journey and make a disruptive promise to that persona. The promise is not the solution to the problem but simply a rephrasing of the problem you are choosing to address.

For example: If the problem is Dalia takes 6 hours getting water, your promise should be to make it faster for her to get water.

Activity Example



(Problem/promise) Templates attached at end of toolkit.

Risk #3

Solving Problems That Don't Matter

What this risk looks like

What a waste.

Jose was annoyed. The organization had spent a lot of time fixing something for a partner who had been complaining loudly. He admitted that was fine, but nothing was being done about the problems that really mattered to the people who were the focus of their mission. It felt like a lot of wasted money and effort.

The root of the problem

Narrow view of what matters.

The goal of this step is to pick problems that genuinely matter.In any real life situation there are multiple priorities and demands. Choices are not simple. Since this is messy and difficult to nail down, it's often easier to ignore the hard question of what matters most. Priorities are selected based on narrow demands, instead of what matter most in the big picture.

Mitigating the risk

Prioritizing is an imprecise art.

Some of the uncertainty in the process cannot be eliminated at this stage in the creative lifecycle. Therefore, some of the "getting it right" will be ironed out later during the action steps, (where learning and pivoting will be used to adjust priorities). At this point, the process forces multiple factors to be considered and balanced against each other. This exposes the debate on priority to more discussion and gives a chance for multiple factors to be considered.

CRITERIA FOR PROBLEMS

Activity Goal

Create a set of criteria to identify what the best problem to address is.

Suggested Time to Complete

15-30 minutes

Group or Individual Activity

This is a group activity.

Facilitator Notes

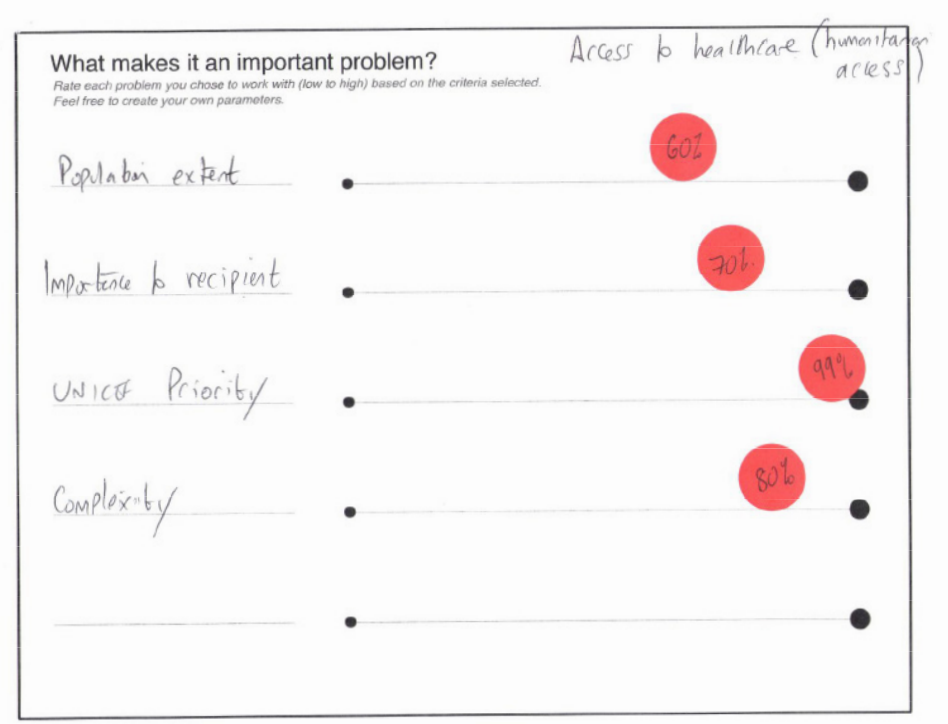
Make sure to assist any groups that may be stuck or having a lot of arguments.

What will the participants be doing

As a group, participants will discuss the criteria they feel make one problem matter more than others. Participants can write their criteria down on post-its or directly on the paper. Criteria should then be voted on and the top 3-5 should be identified.

Afterwards, each group will evaluate each problem they came up with against the top criteria to prioritize the most important problem.

Activity Example



(Evaluating Criteria) Templates attached at end of toolkit.

Risks to successful innovation that involve identifying

THE SOLUTION

When forced to work within a strict framework the imagination is taxed to its utmost - and will produce its richest ideas. Given total freedom the work is likely to sprawl."

-T.S. Eliot

Risk #4

Obvious Solutions

What this risk looks like

This is not innovative.
Tori was disappointed with her team. She was asking for creative game changing ideas and what they were offering up was the most obvious of changes. Anyone looking at the problem could have come up with these suggestions. She wants something less obvious that will ultimately have a bigger impact.

The root of the problem

Small obvious ideas.
The goal of this step is to encourage new and creative ideas. Even when people are told they need to innovate, much of the time they will offer up small obvious changes. While these changes can be valuable, they won't provide the kind of deep invention that changes someone's world in a significant way.

Mitigating the risk

Engage different modes of thinking.
Traditional analytical problem solving consistently produces small obvious solutions. To break free of the obvious, it's important to engage different modes of thinking. When people place themselves in different thinking situations (create a rush of ideas) or use different techniques for thinking (drawing) they literally draw on different parts of their brains. It results in different and more diverse results than any amount of analytical work would produce.

RAPID IDEATION & CLUSTERING

Activity Goal

Generate as many ideas as possible. Create a "toolbox" of possibilities to start shaping the solution.

Suggested Time to Complete

20 minutes (10 ideation +10 clustering)

Group or Individual Activity

Rapid ideation is an individual activity but the clustering is done within the group.

Facilitator Notes

Think quantity not quality. Remind participants that anything is possible at this point. Keep track of time and momentum. There should be no talking within the 10 minute ideation.

What will the participants be doing

Participants should be working individually within the rapid ideation. Any idea is valid at this point just one rule: one idea per post-it.

After the 10 minutes everyone stops and shares ideas. Groups should then start clustering similar ideas.

Activity Example

SOLUTION SHEETS

Activity Goal

Create more concrete solutions using the ideas from the previous exercise.

Suggested Time to Complete

20-30 minutes

Group or Individual Activity

This activity works best when done in pairs.

Facilitator Notes

Solutions should be sketched out. Make sure to encourage participants to show how their solution works though drawings.

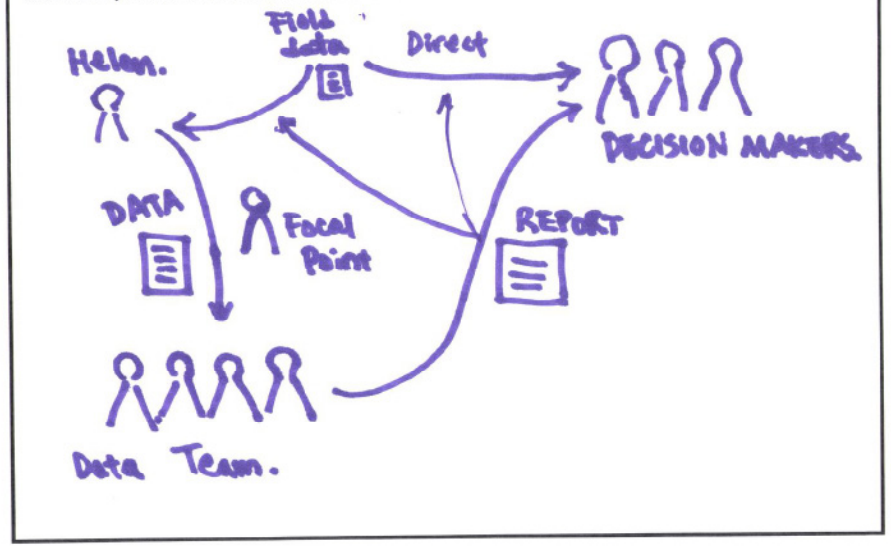
What will the participants be doing

Participants should start using some of the ideas generated before as a "toolbox" for creating solutions. Mix and match to address the problem. They should name their solution and explain how it works with a simple sketch. Groups should be generating as many solution sheets as possible.

Activity Example

Name the idea: Partnership w/ Private Sector (EXTERNAL)

Sketch how it works.
Make sure you draw all the characters involved.



(Solution Sheets) Templates attached at end of toolkit.

Risk #5

Incomplete Ideas

What this risk looks like

Frustrating Gaps.
Susan didn't know what to say to the man standing in front of her. He didn't have access to the transportation he needed to complete the registration process. There were a lot of people like this. They were all ready to finish the process ... but they couldn't get a ride.

The root of the problem

Incomplete Solutions.
The goal is to see the entire problem and define an end to end solution. Innovators naturally focuses on the point where the problem is most obvious, but this is seldom everything that is needed. There are usually steps before and after the actual innovation that must also be in place for the idea to work in the real world. Innovators who look only at the immediate part of the problem often leave gaps which requires "a miracle to occur" for the user to actually receive value.

Mitigating the risk

Map an end to end process.
Most meaningful activities involve multiple players over a period of time. These steps are usually connected together and must all be in place in order for the idea to actually work. Mapping the process from end to end and across the handoffs from one person to another helps make sure that the chain is in place from beginning to end.

SERVICE DESIGN BLUEPRINT

Activity Goal

Develop and understand how the service (system) surrounding the solution would play out to deliver the disruptive promise.

Suggested Time to Complete

30-60 minutes

Group or Individual Activity

This is a group activity. Ideally you want from 3 to 5 people.

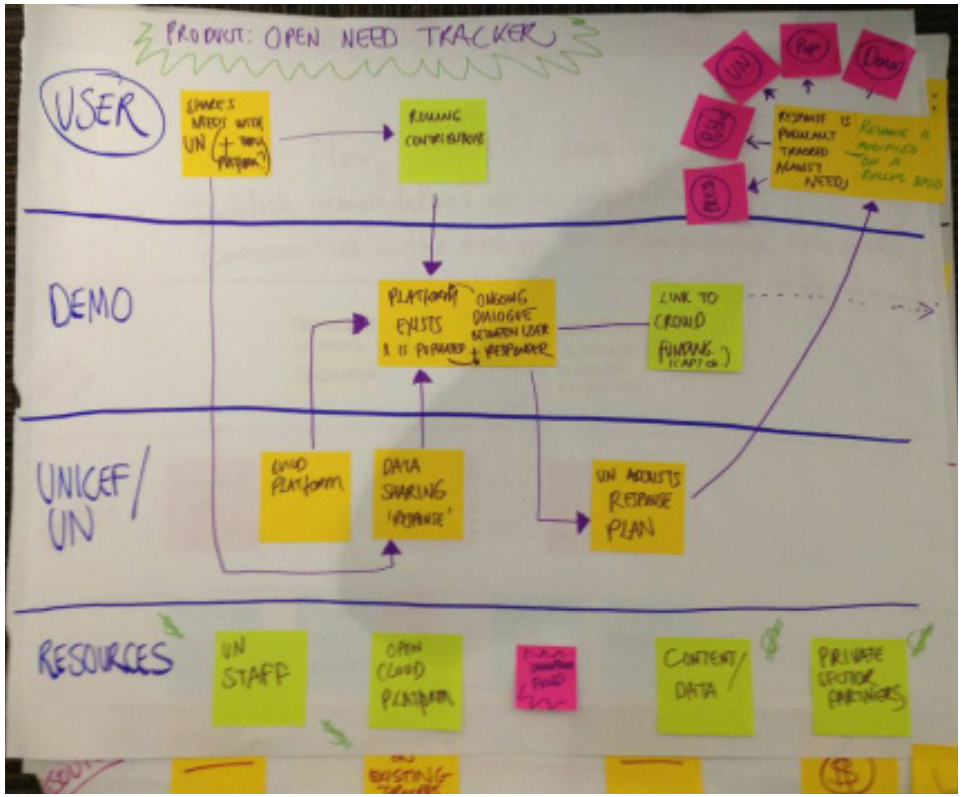
Facilitator Notes

Participants might have a hard time thinking through these layers. Encourage them to ask questions like who, what and where at each level to uncover connections.

What will the participants be doing

After choosing, as a group, which solution they would like to test first, participants start using the service design blueprint to dig deeper into how this solution might play out. By looking at their solution through these 4 layers, participants are able to create an end to end detailed map of their solution.

Activity Example



This activity can be done on any large piece of paper or whiteboard. Just draw the rows and the themes and have post-its in hand for the group to participate. To get other examples and explanations around the Service Design Blueprint visit. http://www.servicedesigntools.org/tools/35

Risk #6

Beginning too Big

What this risk looks like

Stagnation.
The project had started off well enough, then Srikar's team hit some roadblocks discovering unexpected complexity in several areas. They were barely half way through the plan and nothing had been delivered. Both his team and management were beginning to lose hope. Even worse, he suspected there were more surprises ahead. The end seemed a long long way off.

The root of the problem

Ideas are too big.
The goal of this step is to reduce the distance to the first delivery of value. Most projects become stalled and die because they are too big to begin with. Big projects delay success, so when a project runs into trouble it affects the vision. Size also slows the discovery of problems, leaving critical issues undetected. In addition, because being big adds complexity, the problems that need to be solved become more complex and difficult to resolve.

Mitigating the risk

Deliver a "thin slice" of functionality.
Breaking a project into phases makes it smaller, but it loses the other key benefits of delivering an end result. Delivering a "thin slice" of functionality that runs from end to end allows testing of whether an idea is valued by users and exposes unexpected areas of difficulty, allowing the team to learn and adjust. Lack of perfection is far preferable to delaying work and learning.

10 WEEK MVP
(minimal viable product)

Activity Goal
Narrowing down the solution to a feasible, testable, 10 week project.

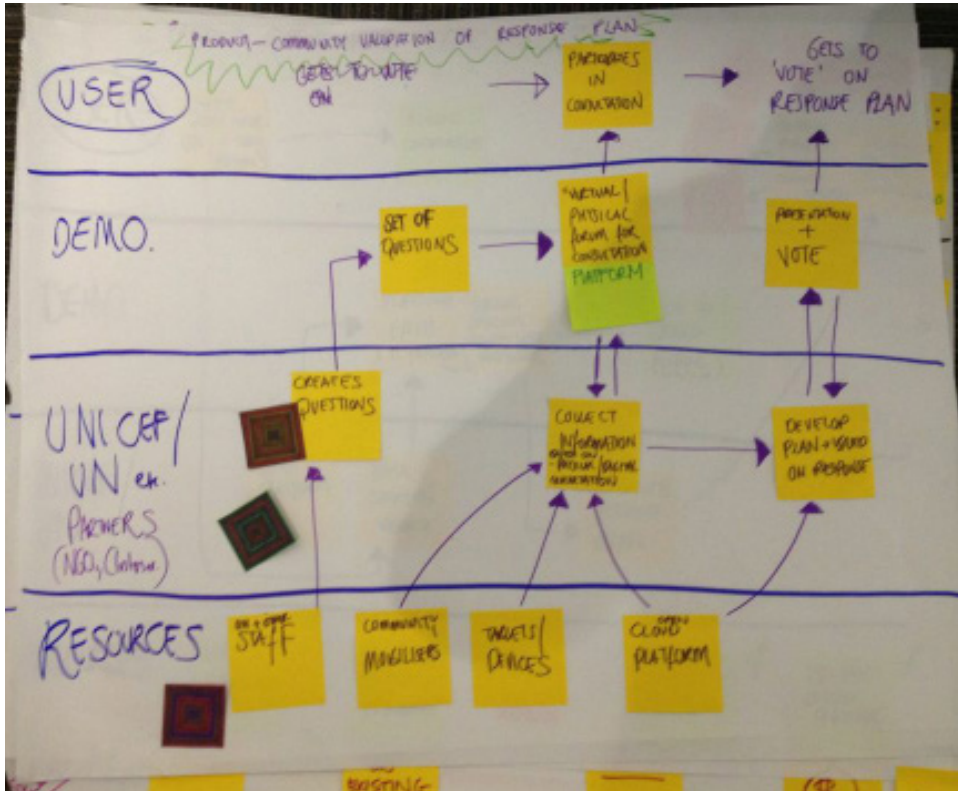
Suggested Time to Complete
40-60 minutes

Group or Individual Activity
This is a group activity.

Facilitator Notes
Encourage participants to think of an end to end 10 week version of their solution. Try to keep them away from creating a timeline or a project plan. They should be asking the questions like who, what and where.

What will the participants be doing
Participants should be looking at their original idea and trying to narrow it down to something that can be done in 10 weeks. It should be an end to end solution and not just a feature. They should create another Service Design Blueprint to show how the MVP would work.

Activity Example



This activity can be done on any large piece of paper or whiteboard. Just draw the rows and the themes and have post-its in hand for the group to participate. To get other examples and explanations around the Service Design Blueprint visit: http://www.servicedesigntools.org/tools/35

Risks to successful innovation that involve identifying

TAKING ACTION

"Hesitating to act because the whole vision might not be achieved, or because others do not yet share it, is an attitude that only hinders progress."

- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Risk #7

Starting too slow

What this risk looks like

Administrator.
Camilla was sitting in a status meeting ... again. She wasn't sure when her idea got turned into percent complete entries on a spreadsheet, but her energy had long since drained away. Her frustration that they hadn't actually tackled the hard parts was worrying her too. It seemed like they could be slowly marching off a cliff and no one would know (or care).

The root of the problem

Starting with a a big formal plan.
The goal of this step is to get things moving and focus on learning. A big formal plan might make sense if there is a clear proven way to do a project. Innovation isn't like that. There are lots of unknowns. Will the idea work? Will people want to adopt it? Will all the parts work together? Are there new things that might be added on? Pre-planning slows things down and shifts the focus away from learning and responding.

Mitigating the risk

~~Test assum~~ptions and possibilities.
Think of innovative action as forays into the unknown. Particularly at the early stages of a project, the most important thing is to learn in areas of uncertainty. You want to make things work as quickly as possible. To do this, begin implementation of the thin end to end slice by identifying areas where questions need answering and imagine the fastest way to explore and test possibilities.

Risk #7

Starting too slow

Ways to Shrink an MVP

Make Steps Light-Weight
Do the minimum

Reuse Existing Tools / Capabilities
Leverage what you have over making new things.

Do Things Manually
Not everything needs to be automated.

Fake It
Do everything possible to create a sense of urgency around the initiative.

Cut Out Steps
Minimize waste. Reduce any steps that are not adding value.

Find Partners
Develop new relationships that help drive to success.

FORAYS

Activity Goal

Create small actionable steps to start testing the solution.

Suggested Time to Complete

30-40 minutes

Group or Individual Activity

This is a group activity.

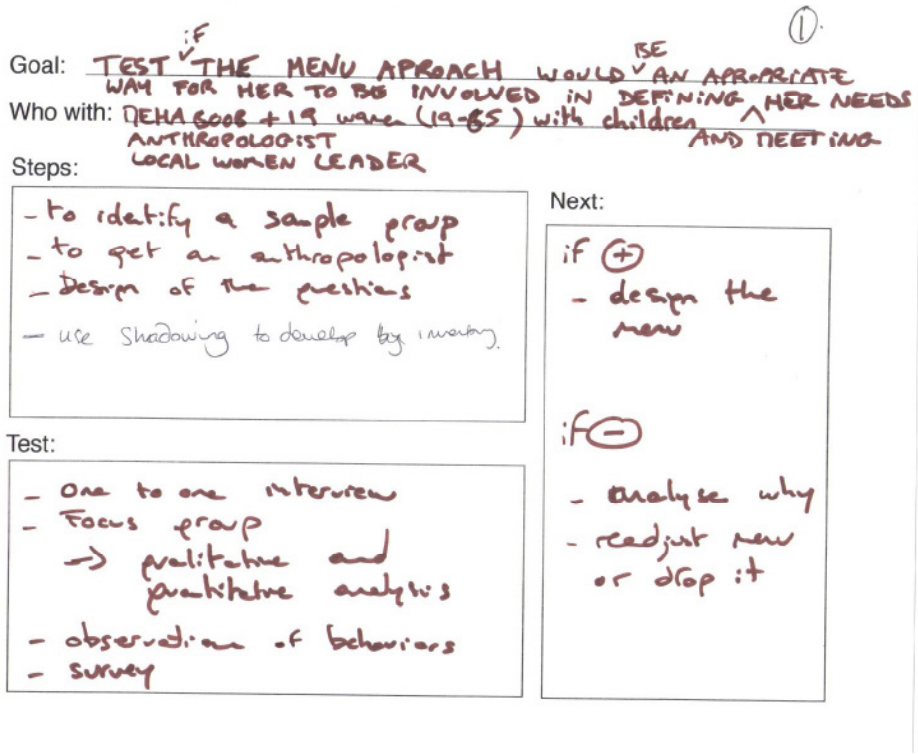
Facilitator Notes

This is a great time to have participants think about assumptions and how they can test them. Encourage participants to think about the smallest/simplest possible way to test their hypothesis.

What will the participants be doing

Participants should look at a specific step or feature within their 10 week MVP that they can test right away. They should fill in the Foray framework with the specifics of how the solution should work including the steps, what they are testing (hypothesis) and next steps.

Activity Example



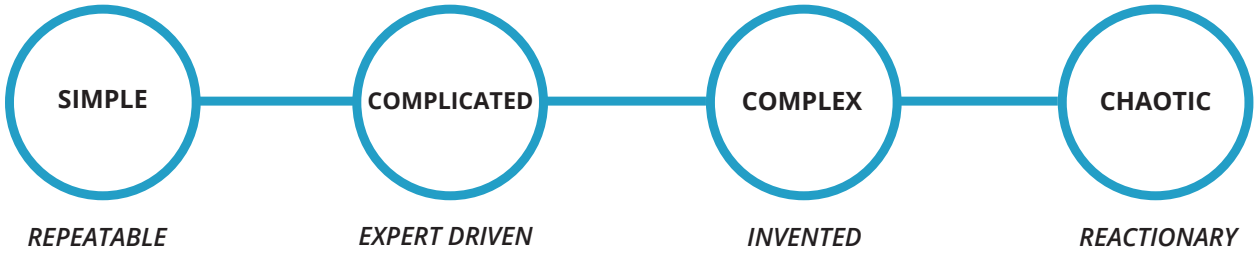
(Foray framework) Templates attached at end of toolkit.

Risk #7

Failing to learn

Acting Differently in Different Environments

Cynefin Model



Dave Snowdon's Cynefin model is a useful way of understanding why differences in action are necessary. He outlines four different environments that an organization can work within.

In a **SIMPLE** environment, there are repeatable outcomes. This is the world of quality management best practices.

In a **COMPLICATED** space there are still predictable outcomes, but more study is needed. This is the domain of analysis and the expert. This is where traditional project management happens.

COMPLEX environments lack certainty. It has patterns but they remain to be discovered. There is no expert or best practice. This is the place where innovation happens, and it requires experimentation and learning.

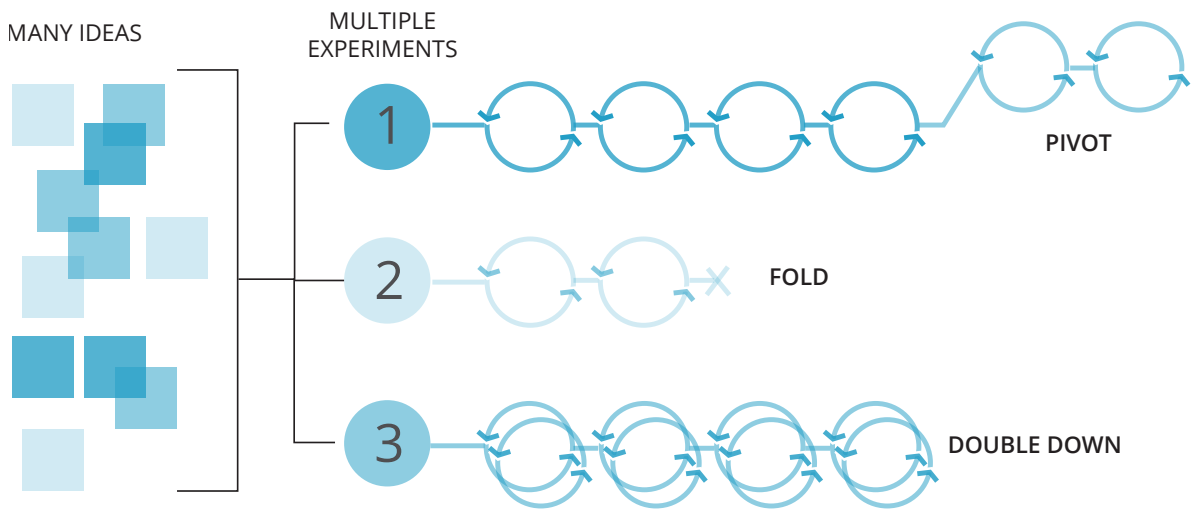
The final environment in the Cynefin model is **CHAOTIC**. Here, it is difficult or impossible to discover the underlying patterns so the best strategy is one of nimble responsiveness.

Harvard Business Review, November 2007
Snowden, David, A Leader's Framework for Decision Making

Risk #8

Failing to learn

Continuous learning drives solution pivots



Pivot- When your learnings and experiments expose a need to adjust your focus.

Fold- When your learnings prove your solution invalid, it may be time to move to the next idea.

Double down- When your learnings and experiments confirm your hypothesis. Continue down that path.

When an organization or an individual choose to work in innovation they leave the domain of SIMPLE and COMPLICATED and must work within the COMPLEX space. Process and up front planning and analysis is replaced by iterative learning.

RETROSPECTIVE

Activity Goal

Get a clear view of what has been working, what hasn't, and what you have learned.

Suggested Time to Complete

15-20 minutes

Group or Individual Activity

This is a group activity.

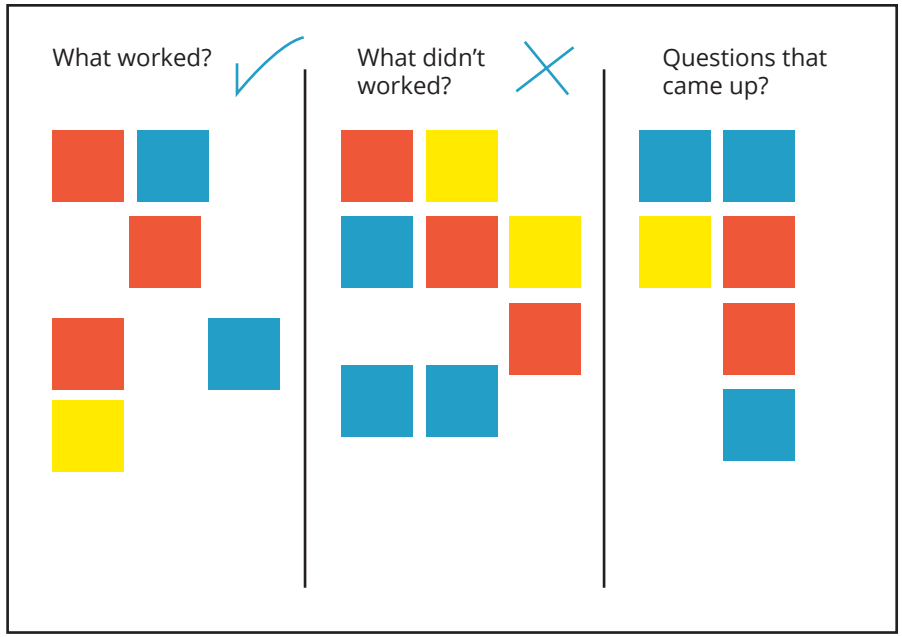
Facilitator Notes

Make sure everyone gets to write at least one for each category.

What will the participants be doing

Everyone should write their thoughts around what worked, didn't work and questions on post-its.Different color post-its can be used for different categories like operations, people, etc.

Activity Example



This activity can be done on any large piece of paper or whiteboard. Just draw the columns and the themes and have post-its in hand for the group to participate.

Risk #9

Failing to scale

What this risk looks like

Loss of energy.
The original pilot project seemed quite promising. A locally based team had come up with several good ideas and been quite resourceful in working around roadblocks and capitalizing on opportunities. However, Chris was now frustrated. When the project was scaled up outside the original home location, it seemed to stall and had never really grown beyond the initial team.

The root of the problem

Failing to scale from a "pilot".
The goal of this step is to sustain action in Complexity. When a pilot project is successful, there is usually an implicit assumption that it is ready to move from "Complex" (where experimentation and responsiveness matters) to "Complicated" (where organization and planning matter). This is seldom actually the case. Scaling an innovation remains a highly exploratory activity, often with as much uncertainty as the original innovation.

Mitigating the risk

Test, learn and pivot.
Innovative action requires the ability to define strategic actions, work quickly, learn and pivot on the results. These tasks obviously require a clear vision for the creative destination, but they also require a passion and personal involvement from the team. Scaling doesn't end this need for vision and flexibility. If anything these early innovation skills are even more essential. To ultimately bring an idea to full use, a passionate engaged team of innovators needs to continue their involvement.

ENGINE, PARACHUTE, ABYSS & BRIDGE

Activity Goal

To simultaneously look back and forward and figure out what has been holding the team back and what are the few different things that need to be done to move the team forward.

Suggested Time to Complete

60 minutes

Group or Individual Activity

This is a group activity.

Facilitator Notes

Make sure you discuss all these themes as a group.

What will the participants be doing

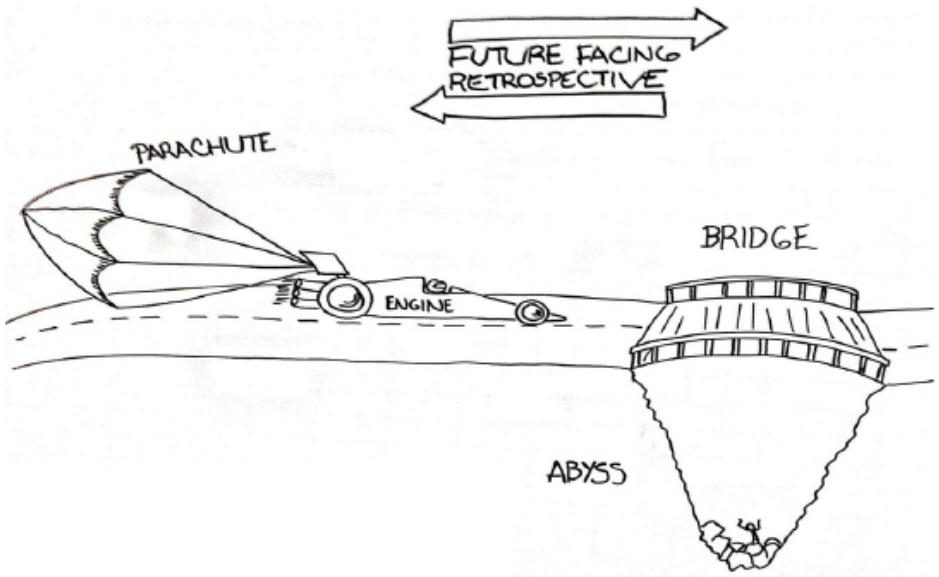
Looking Back - Engine: What has been pushing us forward? Making us move fast?

Looking Back - Parachute: What has been slowing us down?

Looking Ahead - Abyss: What are the dangers ahead? What could take us down the hole?

Looking Ahead - Bridge: What could we build to overcome such challenges? What shall we do to overcome the abyss? Can we arrange them in a priority order?

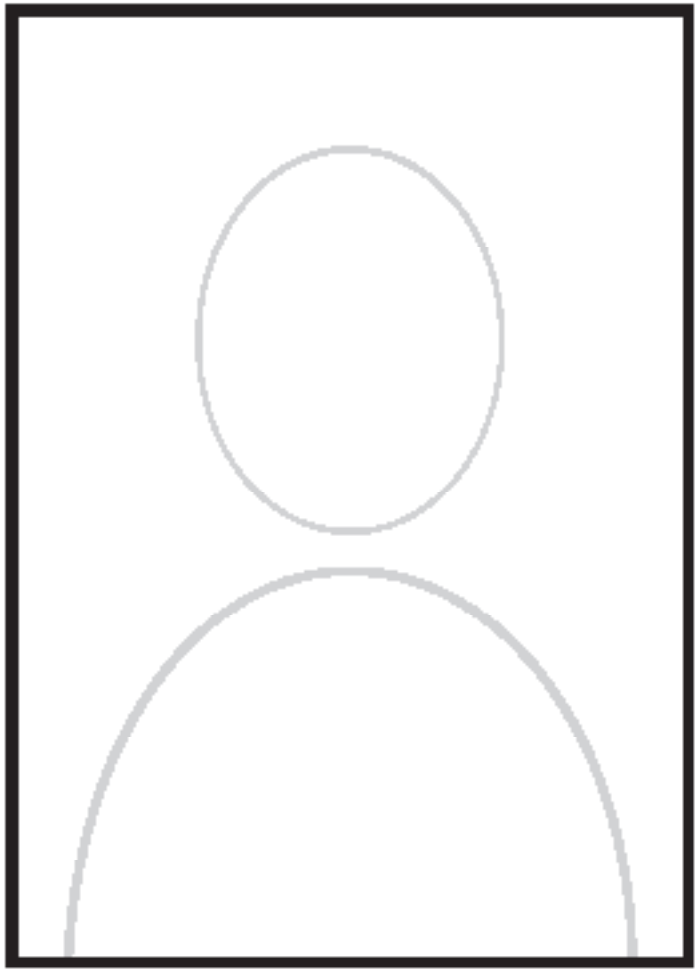
Activity Example



This activity can be done on any large piece of paper or whiteboard. Just draw the elements and have post-its in hand for the group to participate.

ACTIVITY TEMPLATES

PERSONA



Name:

Role:

Background:

Motivators:

Needs:

Frustrations:

Notes:

Person

What's broken?:

Name:

Role:

Task:

Disruptive Promise:

What makes it an important problem?

Rate each problem you chose to work with (low to high) based on the criteria selected.
Feel free to create your own parameters.

Name the idea:

Sketch how it works.

Make sure you draw all the characters involved.

Goal: _____

Who with: _____

Steps:

Next:

Test:

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