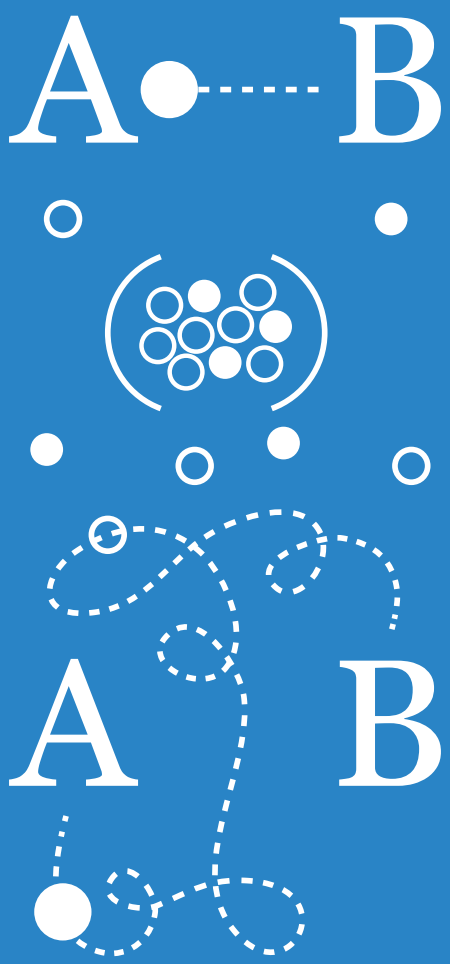
Innovation at UNHCR



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Innovation at UNHCR

Illustrations by Ailadi and Hans Park

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A note from the editors

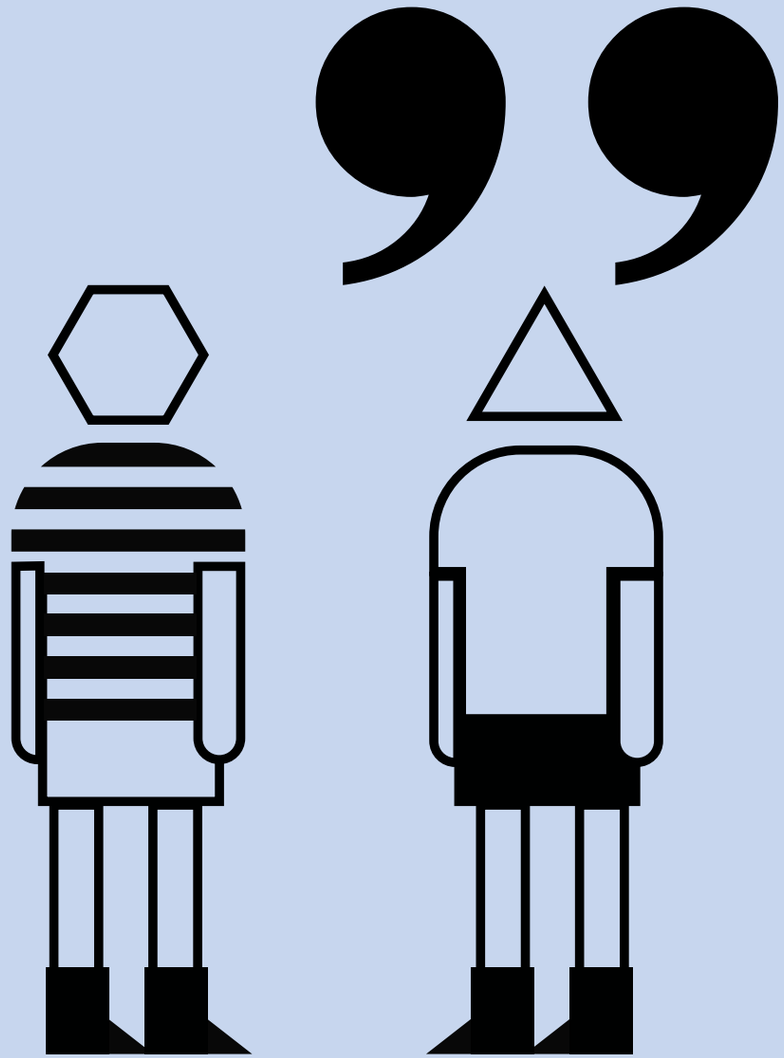
By Lauren Parater, Hans Park and Emilia Saarelainen,
UNHCR's Innovation Service

What does innovation mean? And more importantly, what does it mean to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and how does it relate to your work? We hope this small booklet serves as not only a guide for innovation basics at UNHCR but also a map of stories that connects you to other colleagues who are seeking to create change inside and outside of our organization. The jargon used in the innovation and humanitarian sector can quickly alienate those who want to be involved but just don't know how. We hope what you discover in this publication warmly welcomes you to innovation in the organization and serves as a tool that you can return to as you continue your journey in UNHCR.

There are a lot of assumptions that come with the word innovation. This is a consequence of the societies that we live in, the ones that breed myths about innovation equating technology and accept fallacies like the door of innovation is only open to those who were born with creative talent. And this is simply not the case. It's likely you innovate in your day-to-day and don't even know it. Our organization is full of innovators, creatives, activists, and people willing and able to improve how we serve refugee communities. The role of the Innovation Service is to support you in providing guidance and methodologies to innovate even better, to help capture innovation flourishing across UNHCR and beyond, and then share those bright spots as widely as possible.

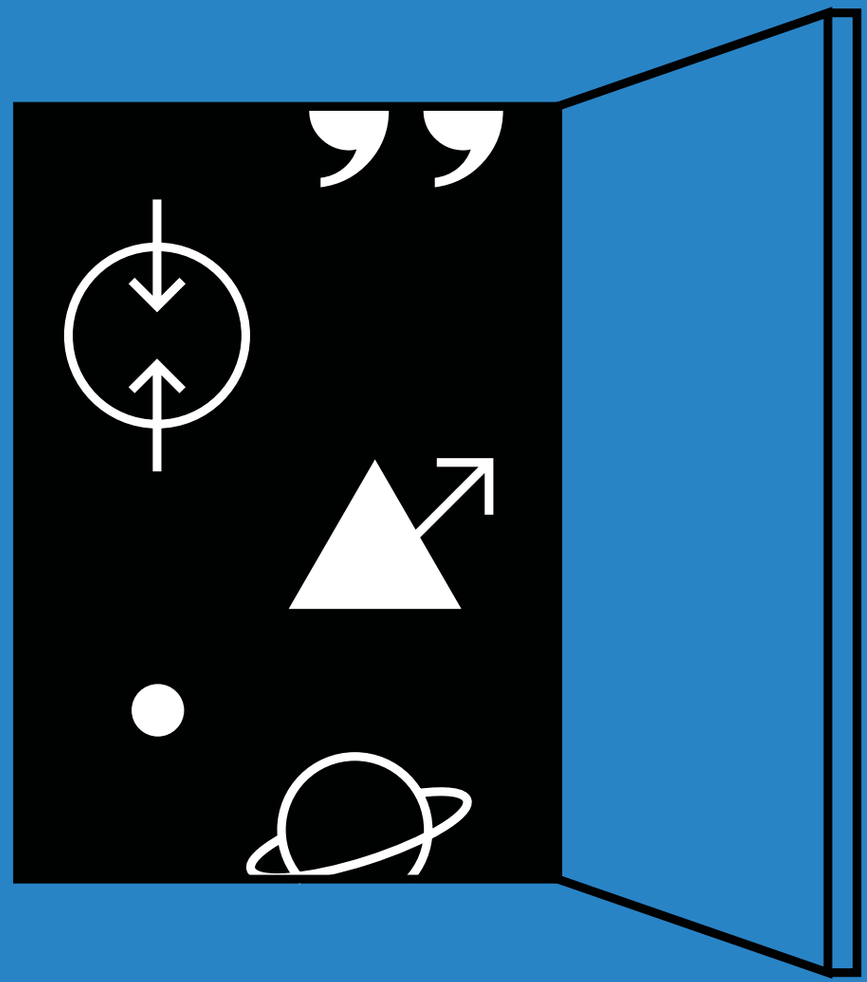
Innovation is rarely straightforward, and our lack of institutional memory can reinforce the status-quo. If people at UNHCR, don't see how much has already changed, they can fall into the trap of believing that they can't challenge current norms. If we look at the evolution of cash-based interventions in displaced communities, we can clearly see the sector was willing to adapt and create a new standard of working - but it took time for us to get there. Cash-based interventions go beyond their technological benefits and have, as of today, truly challenged how the humanitarian sector thinks about dignity and the power of choice for communities.

Each day that passes is an extraordinary time of transformation that we could not foresee. As we witness profound shifts in ideas, perspectives, and frameworks that underpin how our organization operates - it's important to remember the agency that you have to be a part of the change. As you'll read in the forthcoming pages, it probably won't be easy but within the uncertainty, innovation can be the crutch to recognising that you can influence outcomes and the future of how we work at UNHCR.



New ways of thinking and innovation are really important to our organization. Whilst the prime cause of our work has not changed, the scale and the nature of the issues we seek to address has. We cannot hope to solve them with the old solutions and ways of thinking. Hence our ability to innovate becomes a core competence – new ideas, new ways of thinking, new ways of engaging and relating become critical.

Caroline Harper Jantuah,
Senior Advisor - Inclusion, Diversity and Gender Equity



Practical tips for innovating in UNHCR

The word innovation is ubiquitous and confusing to most. We'd use a different word if we could. So what are the first steps for including innovation into your day-to-day work at UNHCR? And what does it actually look like in practice? It's easier than you might think. We've outlined practical applications of the innovation process to help get you started. Employ some of the practical actions and tips in this list and other ideas found throughout this publication. If you still have questions - drop us an email.

Be brave and courageous.

Innovation is not an easy process but it is worth it. You will have to iterate and fail along the way - but use it as an opportunity to learn. It may be difficult to try something outside the established norm because the status quo lends itself to comfort. But take the risk to try something new and it will pay off dividends in the end.

Ask the right question.

You won't get an appropriate solution if you're not asking the right question. Before you start testing new ideas, you'll want to define the problem you actually want to solve. Defining your problem is a crucial step in the innovation process. Keep it short and make sure it only contains one problem. You can continue to tweak your problem statement until you've identified the right problem.

Engage refugees or your end users.

Engage your end users in your innovation process - whether they are UNHCR staff, partners or refugees. For example, refugees are better at knowing what works for them and what doesn't. They are great innovators and full of their own ideas. Ask your users for their feedback throughout the process - but explore opportunities to empower them as innovators themselves.

Ideate.

Take advantage of other people's creativity and facilitate a brainstorming session with your team members, colleagues, and refugees to create new ideas. Invite people with a wide range of disciplines. Crazy ideas are welcomed and should be built upon.

Experiment.

Experimentation is a crucial part of innovation, and some would argue that there's no innovation without experimentation. To innovate, we need to learn by doing - so just give it a go and test your assumptions. Try new things. Keep testing your original idea or process. Discover what works and what doesn't. Then experiment again.

Challenge your assumptions.

Every time we approach a problem, we bring assumptions that limit our ability to think about new solutions. Think critically about the assumptions underlying your innovation and then test them in a systematic way.

Collaborate.

Too often we assume collaboration will happen when a group of people is simply put together. It doesn't. If we want to innovate, we have to collaborate meaningfully. This requires us to move beyond just "sharing information" with others and actively engaging colleagues in our work and the innovation process. Work with other divisions, bureaux, external companies, academia, and others during the innovation process. Choose a partner with different skills and ideas. Go outside the usual suspects. Be flexible and open to different types of collaboration.

Embrace failure.

Innovation isn't a straightforward process and the environment UNHCR operates in is increasingly complex and uncertain - linearity is often an unrealistic goal. This process will often bring a few missteps and failures along the way. Acknowledging that failure happens to the best of us, and using that opportunity to build the skills needed to learn from one's mistakes is key.

Copy someone else's idea.

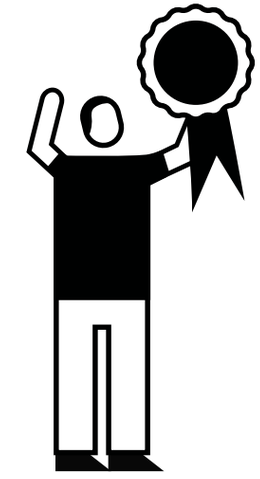
When is innovation simply imitation? Often. Look at promising practices that already exists elsewhere and apply it to your operation and context. Innovation is about creating value in your specific context - so experiment with what has worked in other places to no reinvent the week.

Innovate with everyone.

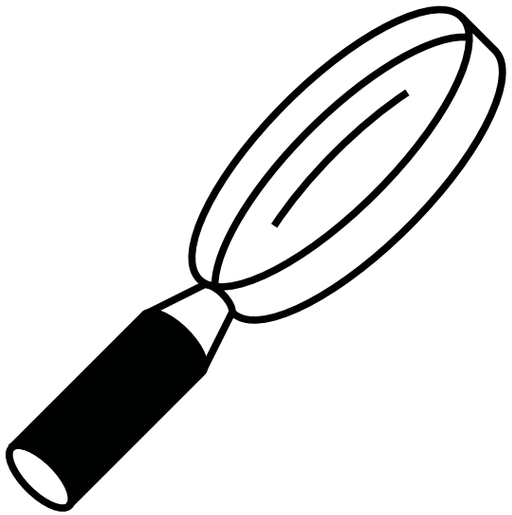
Include targets for innovation within your team, division or operation. Measure these targets and the impact you've had. Don't just have one innovation focal point - include innovation into everyone's objectives. Before you realize it, everyone will be a champion of innovation.

Don't forget - anyone can innovate.

Anyone can innovate, regardless of age, nationality, position or gender. Innovators have the right attitude, a creative mindset, and an ability to see things differently and bend the boundaries. And most importantly, they have a desire to solve complex challenges—and given the right tools, attitude, and environment, each person has the power to create change.



FAQs on innovation



What is innovation?

- Innovation is the process of translating an idea or invention into a good or service so that it creates value.[1]
- Innovation is an iterative process that identifies, adjusts, and diffuses ideas. The innovation process utilises a set of tools and methodologies through which to solve challenges and identify opportunities. It's non-linear, it's experimental, and it is robust.
- Innovation is not simply technology, it is not only for the younger generations, and it is not something only a few people can do.

Why is innovation important to UNHCR?

- Innovation is important to UNHCR because it makes us more agile, more open to collaboration, and more effective for the people we serve. This not only needs to continue, but innovation as an approach needs to become increasingly central to how we solve problems, address challenges and prepare UNHCR for the future of forced displacement.
- Innovation is about creating value for refugees, introducing novel solutions, and doing things better.

Who innovates in UNHCR?

- Anyone in the organization can innovate if they wish, regardless of age, nationality, position or gender. Innovators have a creative mindset, attitude, an ability to see things differently and to bend the boundaries. They have a desire to solve complex challenges facing our organization - given the right tools, each person in the organization has the power to create change.

Why do we need to create space to innovate in UNHCR?

- In order to create sustainable innovation in UNHCR, we need to focus on mindset, culture, and collaboration. Everyone can be an innovator, but no one can do it alone or without an open approach to teamwork. This requires that managers at all levels of the organization encourage and create the space for staff to innovate and experiment in their day-to-day work.
- The innovation mindset UNHCR is trying to foster is challenging assumptions, changing perspectives, instilling the value of collaboration and openness for failure and risk-taking; this cannot be done without space for innovation.

Why do we need partnerships for innovation?

- Partnerships allow learning and the exchange of expertise and intelligence between industries, allowing said industries to co-create solutions effectively. Diversity of stakeholders should define the partnership pursuit process. It is not exclusive to the private sector, but also to the expertise of other UN agencies, academia, local partners, and most importantly, refugees themselves.

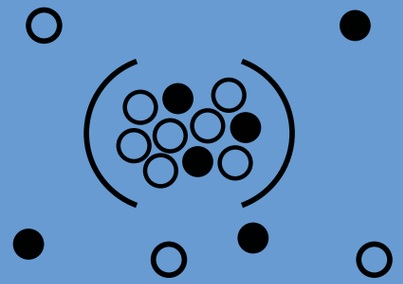
What is the role of UNHCR's Innovation Service?

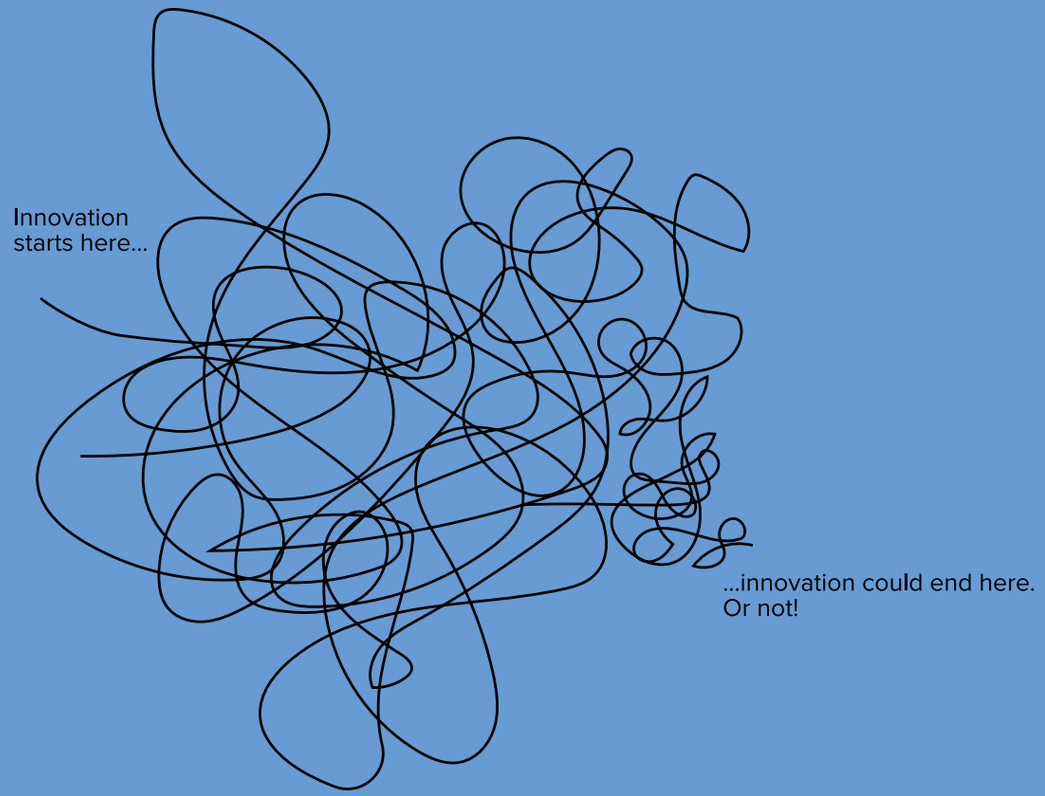
- UNHCR's Innovation Service creates an enabling environment for innovation to flourish in UNHCR by facilitating spaces to innovate, capturing bright spots, and ensuring that innovation is accessible to staff and refugees so they can increasingly draw on innovation to solve the most pressing of challenges.

Notes:

1. Business Dictionary: http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/innovation.html

A Simplified Innovation Process
Three non-linear steps to innovating





This is a simplified version of a larger innovation process. The below steps do not capture the whole process and complexity of innovation, but it's a brief introduction to get you started.

Identify a problem and rethink it again. And again and again.

Innovation starts by identifying a problem or spotting an opportunity to do something better. Problems are a means to an opportunity. So, identify and frame a problem and then start questioning the problem, rethinking the problem and reframing the problem. Ask a lot of questions! Uncovering the real issue can be a time-consuming process, but you don't want to miss it- focusing on anything else than the real issue is a waste of time and resources.

"The first step towards a great answer is to reframe the question."
- Tom & David Kelly

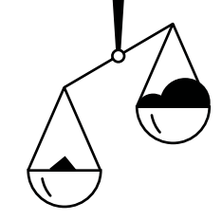
Bring in your creativity and collaborate with others on ideas.

With your newly defined problem in hand and a diverse range of perspectives, it's time to release all your creativity and discover and/or create as many ideas or solutions as possible. This is a collaborative action so it's encouraged to bring together people with different background and expertise to get started. We often fall into the trap of solving a problem the same way every time - step back from the obvious solutions; visualize your ideas with mind maps; brainstorm good ideas; brainstorm bad ideas; unpack your assumptions, and use any other tool you find appropriate and useful in your case.

It's also good to remember our own biases. Even if we say we like creativity, we don't really like things that challenge our ways of thinking and that's why we tend to deny truly creative ideas. We have a bias toward the practicality over the novelty. Acknowledging this (and other biases) help us to be more creative.

Experimentation – really just try it out!

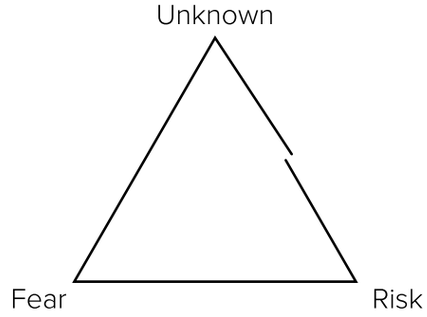
Keep it simple. Find out how you can run quick experiments to test your solutions (or parts of it). Continue to iterate and refine your idea or solution along the way. Experimentation is all about learning. It is about answering your questions and testing your assumptions. It is about gathering data. Experimentation helps us to make more informed decisions about our ideas and projects. Design your experiment so that you can start tomorrow and put a (not too long!) timeframe on it. The idea is to collect as much information with as little effort as possible.



CULTURE

Why is innovation so difficult? An ode to all innovators.

By Emilia Saarelainen, Innovation Fellowship Programme Manager



We all know that innovation is hard, but why exactly is it so difficult?

Innovation is about people

Before we can even start talking about the difficulties of the actual act of innovating, we need to be clear on what we mean by innovation and what's needed to innovate.

Innovation doesn't happen without innovators. Innovation is not about finding the new bright idea, it's not about having all types of processes in place and it's not about technology. It's about people, those ones who are passionate about what they do and want to drive change. People are the backbone of innovation. And that's exactly the reason why it's also so difficult. People, you and I, us and them, are required to make innovation to happen, but we are also part of the problem and a reason why it is so difficult.

We have a very limited understanding about who is and who can be an innovator. An innovator is seen to be a lone inventor, an Einstein type of individual (usually a white man) sitting alone in a basement and coming up with new ideas. Innovation is often understood as "the best idea" and an innovator as the one having a light bulb moment magically leading to a successful implementation. This narrative is misleading as innovation is not just about generating ideas and innovators are not just inventors. Anyone can innovate, regardless of age, nationality, position or gender. Innovators have the right attitude, a creative mindset, and an ability to see things differently and bend the boundaries. And most importantly, they have a desire to solve complex challenges—and given the right tools, attitude and environment, each person has the power to create change.

Innovation requires a wide range of skills

When we talk about innovation skills, we typically talk about just one type of skills, creative (thinking) skills, i.e. an individual's ability to generate new ideas, solve problems and think creatively. We think about artists or entrepreneurs who seem to have creativity as a gift to do something magical (while the rest of us just admire it from aside). But this is misleading because, first of all, innovation skills are not just about creativity skills and second, being innovative is not the privilege of a few select persons; it's possible to learn how to be creative and how to be innovative. There are tons of tools and techniques to help you to enrich your creative skills, i.e. have new ideas, think creatively, overcome your thinking habits, etc. Additionally, there are innovation tools, methods, and guidebooks that help you to go through the rest of the innovation process and provides tools for identifying a problem, test assumptions, design and guide through an experiment, etc.

So, the good news is that anyone can learn to use innovation tools, the bad news is that it might be the easiest part. Innovation is not just about tools and methods, but it's also, and even more about mindset. Innovation is an iterative process, uncertainty and unknown being an inevitable part of it. Going through that process requires one being comfortable with confusion, failures, and disappointments and it's not always easy or pleasant. Innovating can be nerve-wracking, uncomfortable or even scary.

There's no toolkit to help you to teach it or prepare for it, the only way to learn it is to go through it, experience it and learn by doing. As an innovator, you need to be persistent and have resilience for all this.

And as if this would not be enough, there's a third set of skills that is important, especially for those innovating in a large organization: communicating, influencing, and convincing. Whatever you want to do, it needs to be shared with many different actors in the organization. It needs to be communicated in the right way to the right people in order to make anything happen. And often making the case isn't sufficient, facts don't convince people, but you need a strategy on how to get people on board

and make the change. Innovators don't act in isolation, they are working in a specific operational and political environment that they need to know how to navigate.

Innovation is not something you can learn just from books. There are tools and methods available for innovators, but they cover only a small part of skills one needs to innovate. Also, tools and methods don't mean much, if they don't lead to a change in behaviours and habits. And in order for innovation to be fully practised in daily work and for it to become a habit, you need time, effort and practise. It's about creating "muscle memory" for innovative ways of thinking and acting. The only way to learn innovation is to actually take action and do things.

No one can innovate alone

Anyone can be an innovator, but no one can do it alone. The range of skills needed to innovate is so large that it is unlikely that one individual will be strong on all of them. Needed skills are also changing throughout the process (for example, idea generation requires different types of skills than scaling), individuals simply can't have them all. So, we need to work with others, we need teams to innovate.

Innovation is all about collaboration. At its simplest, collaboration means working with others to achieve something. However, as we know, in reality working with others is not always that easy. It can feel frustrating, draining and unproductive. The more diverse the team is, the harder the collaboration can be (but the outcomes are better[1]). There are more perceptions and different viewpoints to consider, a greater exchange of knowledge, decision making takes more time, and there's always a possibility for a conflict.

For individuals wishing to innovate this means yet another set of skills for them to master- collaboration skills. Collaboration requires a high level of trust and emotional intelligence. For talkers, it might be difficult to be quiet and listen (actively!), for less talkative and/ or reserved people, it can be difficult to make themselves heard; you need to be able to communicate your point of view openly and effectively and be willing to compromise; and you must have the ability to be tolerant and accepting of others. People need to be able to let go of control and their own ego and believe that collaboration and working with others will bring possibilities to create something greater than working alone would.

If collaboration is hard for individual team members, it's also hard for supervisors and managers trying to manage and support a diverse team. Too often we assume collaboration will happen when a group of people are put together. It doesn't. It requires goals and methods and a lot of it depends on managers' skills to create an environment fostering and supporting collaborative efforts.

People need to be taught to act together in multidisciplinarity to develop novelty into innovation, supervisors and managers need to be taught to lead and manage teams and collaborative work, and the leadership need to set the tone for a true collaborative organizational culture.

We are afraid of innovation. All of us.

Innovation is scary, but what exactly are we afraid of? Well, we experience the fear of making a mistake, failure, unknown, uncertainty, looking foolish, being different, losing control, disappointing ourselves, disappointing others, imperfection, taking the first step, taking a risk, getting no rewards, rejection, losing face or prestige, being judged, thinking we are not creative, and change - just to name a few.

Fear is a strong emotion as it prepares us to react to danger. It can slow some functions of our body down, while sharpening other functions helping us to survive. These are normal reactions, our brains are just trying to protect us from harm, but it's not pleasant to experience them and the natural reaction is to avoid them. Fear can paralyse us from taking action and ultimately, hold people back. Therefore, fear is not a friend of innovation, so we need to find ways to deal with the emotion that hinders it and thus, in order to find a coping mechanism with innovation fears, we need to understand them better. Here's a list of three of the biggest fears associated with innovation.

1. Fear of unknown

The dominant and the strongest fear of all is the fear of unknown. By nature, most of the people tend to prefer certainty. The problem is that innovation by its nature is characterised by uncertainty. In innovation (jargon), this uncertainty is often divided into two: there are known unknowns and unknown unknowns. Known unknowns are something that we know we don't know. There are risks involved in such situations, but they can be calculated and managed with risk management, which reduces the uncertainty and provides us with some kind of feeling of certainty. Whereas, unknown unknowns are something that we don't know that we don't know. It's a kind of uncertainty that can't be dealt with risk management, it can only be managed by experimenting and learning. Preparing yourself or your team for the uncertainty and unforeseeable is difficult, if not impossible. You are asked to jump in and try something you don't know what the outcome will be and you have no idea what is waiting for you. The fear of the unknown leads to problems in dealing with uncertainty. Something unexpected might happen, which would be different from what people are used to. No guidebook can prepare you for how it feels to be in the middle of uncertainty without being sure about a direction to go. Essentially, managing innovation is about mastering uncertainty.

2. Fear of failure

Most individuals, managers, and organizations are fearful of making mistakes. Failing is considered shameful and painful. However, failure is an inevitable part of innovation. It doesn't mean that failing more often would directly lead to innovation, of course not, but more frequent trials (with

learning from them) most likely do. And the more trials you do, the more unsuccessful trials (or better to say, trials with negative results) you may experience - and that may feel like a failure. Fear of failure keeps us from taking a step into the unknown, and not even trying and that paralyses innovation. It's normal to experience fear of failure as most of us have gone through an education system that taught us that failure isn't a positive thing. We were rewarded only for the best grades and taught that we always have to know, we always have to win. But innovation doesn't work like that - it doesn't flourish in such an environment. There isn't always one right answer, you may need to try (and fail) several times before succeeding. And you might still not succeed. But what is comforting is that fear of failure is mostly a learned emotion and we can unlearn that.

> There's no toolkit to help you to teach it or prepare for it, the only way to learn it is to go through it, experience it and learn by doing. As an innovator, you need to be persistent and have resilience for all this.

3. Fear of risk-taking

Most people are risk-averse and would prefer to go with a tried and known solution rather than taking their chances on an unproven solution.2 Taking the known solution, playing safe is comfortable as it makes us feel in control. Innovating is the opposite. There's no feeling of control and it gives you a sense of insecurity. Risk-taking is scary because nobody knows if the risk you take will pay off (that's why it is called risk). But any kind of development is impossible if you never take any risks - especially if you wish to try and build something completely new, some level of risk is inevitable. It is easier to embrace the risk, if we understand what we mean by risks. In its simplest form, risk can be considered as something that can lead to a damage, this can be for example a financial loss, reputational damage or in the worst case, harm caused to people we try to help. So risks should be taken seriously, but they should not prevent us innovating. Taking a risk doesn't need to mean to bet everything, there are ways to mitigate the risk (for example: through experimenting and learning). It is also good to remember that doing nothing, inaction, can also be a risk. Often the fear is bigger than the risk itself.

All these fears are normal, and they don't only cause fear to innovate, but they also may prohibit others to innovate. Managers and organizations experience exactly the same fears of unknown, failure, and risk-taking as individual innovators or teams do, but their fears are often turned into resistance. So even if you as an innovator have managed to overcome your fears (or more likely, act despite your fears), you still have to persuade the others to come to your side. So, it's actually not enough to deal with your own fears, you need to find a way to deal with other people's fears as well.

There's always resistance

There's resistance to innovation, because there's resistance to change. People don't like to change. People like the status quo and we want things to be as they are (sometimes even if we claim otherwise). How often have you heard managers and organizations praising innovation, but when it comes to action they tell you "We can't do that, because that's not the way we do things here," or "We have tried this before and it doesn't work." What do you do with all these innovation competences and enthusiasm, if there's no space to use them? Typically, large organizations are designed to execute and be efficient, not to innovate. They are built for short-term performance, not for innovation. So, in a way innovators go against what the organizations are designed for. Organizations do need traditionalists too, they have a role in organizations, but they don't always make innovators' lives easy.

Innovation requires that managers at all levels of the organization encourage, and create the space for staff to innovate and experiment in their day-to-day work. They must decrease fear of failure and create an environment of psychological safety. The real innovation challenge is overcoming organizational resistance.

Innovating is difficult because innovation is difficult. It's not just about learning tools and methods but it touches upon a variety of emotions (innovators as well as others) and it's embedded into experimentation, collaboration, and diversity. It's about going through a journey that can be unpleasant, lonely, and scary and it requires people who have passion, drive, and resilience to go through it all.

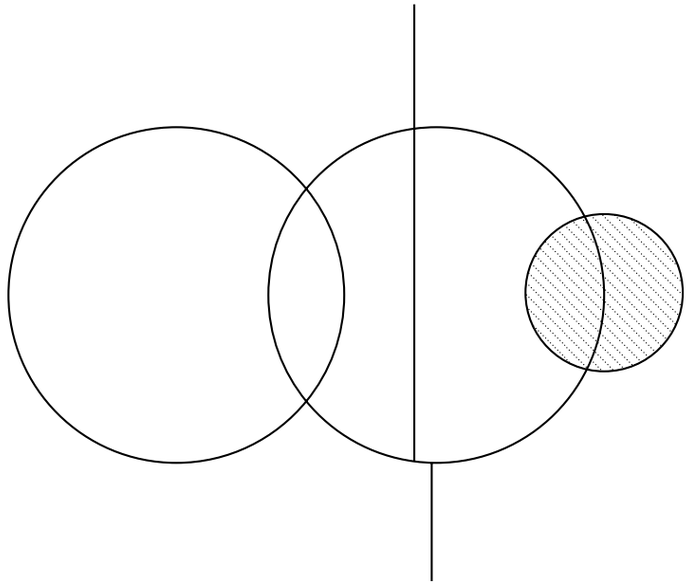
Innovators, praise yourselves. You are superstars.

Notes:

1. Diverse Teams Feel Less Comfortable - and That's Why they Perform Better, Harvard Business Review.
2. Creative Action in Organisations. Chapter 21: Why no one really wants creativity (Barry M. Straw).

The promise of boring innovation

By Salvatore Vassallo, Senior Admin Programme Associate



Administration is probably the first contact point anyone has in the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). In reality, everything we do has a sort of administration process linked to it. When one of us joined UNHCR in November 2007, an era that was already embracing Facebook and long past the early days of the internet, we were handed over a few typewriters to begin our work. This is unfortunately not a joke, but a reflection on how long it can take organizations to catch-up to the real world. Coming from the private sector, this was a bit of a shock to say the least. I witnessed these same feelings wash over the faces of the even younger new recruits who were told we had to use them to fill out separation documents as one of our first tasks. I took this challenge head-on, quickly teaming up with a few new colleagues and recreated the same form but in Microsoft Excel. I consider this my first feeling of innovation in UNHCR. Sometimes innovation is quick and boring, but it brings efficiency to a process—and to me this is the key to making our organization and other UN agencies more innovative.

The bureaucratic state of play

Each day in admin and finance we are working with strongly controlled processes. On one hand, rules are important because they frame each step to accomplish a goal—whether that is in procurement, contracts or travel requests. These rules ensure that the processes which drive our organization are transparent and trackable, and this is important. However, rules and regulations also need to evolve with the passing of time. We cannot allow these rules to be a burden when they are expected to add concrete value to a process. In many ways, working in administration at UNHCR is a bit like fighting against the bureaucracy itself. If these rules, which act as our guiding light, become overcomplicated or impenetrable, we can simply not be efficient. The heaviness of this workflow can become a barrier in serving the interests of persons of concern. For example, if we are not able to process a payment quickly enough, then this can directly affect the work going on in our field operations.

Actions for a more efficient way forward
So what would a better system look like for us? A quick answer would be: faster, simplified, agile, and more flexible.

We are not here to argue against rules—we concretely believe that UNHCR needs guidelines, standards, and order. We need this in many aspects of our life. But we do believe that when these rules have turned into clear bureaucracy, we should seize the opportunities to improve them. Bureaucracy is a real barrier to innovation. Even if someone within the organization has a brilliant idea, the long processes of reviewing, selecting, testing, authorising, clearing, and signing off of this solution can kill it before it even has had a chance to impact refugees. It is within this institutional structure that we need to find the space to try new things and innovate the old. The structural speed of our processes needs to catch-up with the innovations currently taking place in the field and Headquarters. The current state of play of our traditional and institutional architecture needs a facelift.

Actions for a more efficient way forward
So what would a better system look like for us? A quick answer would be: faster, simplified, agile, and more flexible.

First, it would focus more on the outcome rather than the format in which such an outcome would have to be finalised. Within UNHCR's Innovation Service, we pride ourselves in acting quickly to respond to requests. This is something that should be mainstreamed across the organization at all levels. Our main priority is the well being

and protection of the 65 million people displaced—this level of efficiency would not only change how we work, but how we could approach challenges.

These are some areas where we can start acting on now:

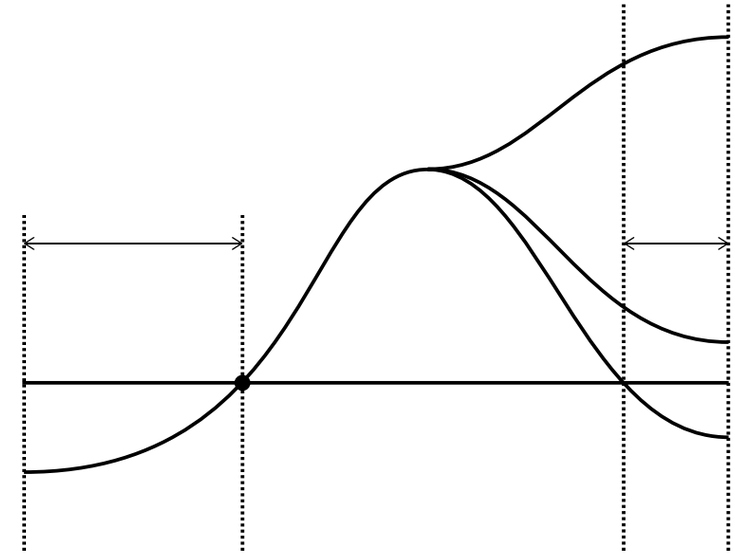
- Decreasing the number of authorisation levels for administrative processes
- De-partitioning general administrative tasks such as travel requests
- Implementing a programme cycle more aligned with the needs of the field
- Identifying and prioritising processes that can reasonably be simplified
- Creating a better system for internal communication between the field and HQ

Moving into 2018, the UNHCR Innovation Service will begin mobilising around some of these areas for experimentation. While we argue that technology does not equate innovation, new technology does offer a lot of opportunities for change in administration activities. Currently, when a memo needs to be approved internally, assistants go from person to person asking for signatures to clear the memo. If we could utilise automation and shorten this approving process, colleagues would have more time to get other important work done. But all solutions don't have to be all about tech. What if we had a corporate card that accrued all the miles from the flights the organization is spending money on? We would be earning points and using the rewards to ensure new flights cost the organization less overall. This would be one simple change to save the organization quite a bit of money. Or if UNHCR were to go paperless, it would truly be a disruptive form of innovation for our institutions.

The first step for realising this change will be to admit as an organization that we need it. We need to evolve and we need to make our backend processes and rules fit for purpose. Our call to action is to ask you to put down your typewriters and invest in big, boring, and bureaucratic innovation.

Why innovation needs storytelling

By Lauren Parater, Innovation Community and Content Manager



We see stories everywhere. We listen to stories, we tell stories—they are one of humanity's universals across cultures. We revolve around transmitting information and experiences, whether that is around a campfire, a table or an idea. Stories have the power to change our beliefs and behaviours, and they are one of the greatest tools we have for engaging audiences around complex issues such as climate change, migration, and other social issues. Stories get told, and retold, and therein shape society and mythologies around our identities. Sometimes these stories are simplified, rewritten or manipulated in such ways that they do not address the complex nature of what truly occurred. At the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), we see how the stories told around innovation have shaped the way colleagues perceive

innovation in the humanitarian sector. The stories people tell about innovation shape how others understand and relate to it. The enduring mythologies of the Steve Jobs and Bill Gates of the world have left innovation to be interpreted as a privilege—privilege reserved for those in the ivory towers of Silicon Valley. As Hana Schank, a Public Interest Technology Fellow at the nonprofit think tank New America explains,

"The story of innovation, as it is typically told, is one of rule breakers, stay-up-all-nighters, people who are sharper and shinier than everyone else–whiz kids. And those whiz kids all look the same. Young. Male. Techies or policy wonks or numbers geniuses."

The greatest innovators at UNHCR challenge this stereotype but the stories that have proliferated across the organization have embedded and nurtured this unoriginal caricature. And those who benefit from this single story have told it over and over again for their own benefit. Fortunately, master narratives can be countered—and innovation is the perfect avenue to understand how stories can build support, persuade, and challenge the notion of who gets to be an innovator.

Our brains on stories

Why do our brains love stories so much? Scientists have discovered that a good story lights up your brain in the same way pleasure does. As we follow the emotionally charged events of a story, the popular compound oxytocin rewards us for continuing along the journey. Stories have the ability to excite the neurons that make dopamine and stimulate the creation of oxytocin—the chemical that promotes prosocial, empathetic behaviour. Neuroscientist Uri Hasson argues that "a story is the only way to activate parts in the brain so that a listener turns the story into their own idea and experience."

Steven Pinker, a Harvard University psychologist, argues that stories are powerful tools for both learning and the development of relationships with others. Storytelling has played a key role in social cohesion between groups and is a particular form of communication for passing information through generations. Pinker argues that there are neurological roots tied to social cognition not only for telling tales but also the science behind why we enjoy them. The oxytocin we derive from stories helps us care and feel connected to others—whether we like it or not.

Psychologists have also discovered that stories have the ability to transport us into the world of narrative and they are inherently more effective at changing beliefs and behaviours than facts are. For the cognitive benefits to have an effect though, you have to be telling a story that actually compels the reader to engage in this distinct mental process. Do you have a coherent plot? Do you have a story arc? Are there characters? Are the characters engaging? All of these things help to make a good story and therein, make your story more effective.

Making innovation inclusive and accessible

So, you might stay up all night curled up with your favourite book because your brain loves a good story—but how does this relate to innovation?

Within your organization, storytelling can act as a carrier for messages, assist in reinforcing cultural values or transform into a powerful persuasive tool. There is extensive research on the benefits of organizational storytelling, as sociologist Yiannis Gabriel notes, "Organization and management studies, no less than consumer studies, cultural studies, media and communication studies, oral history, as well as substantial segments of legal studies, accounting, and studies of the professions and science, have enthusiastically adopted the idea that, in creating a meaningful universe, people resort to stories....stories make experience meaningful, stories connect us with one another; stories make the characters come alive, stories provide an opportunity for a renewed sense of organizational community."

At UNHCR, storytelling is a critical tool for making innovation accessible to our colleagues, developing a shared understanding of innovation, and creating a path for organizational change. More importantly, storytelling can help colleagues imagine themselves in similar experiences to the people who are already innovating, and therefore, build empathy for a character they may not have otherwise related to.

How to use stories as a strategic tool

For me, the wonderful thing about stories is that they are not only powerful cognitive tools but they can be malleable based on your challenges and how you want to create change within your organization. Organizational stories can be used to persuade, educate, reassure, inform, explain, connect, construct meaning, or simplify.

1. Stories to transport messages or vision:

We use stories to help illustrate our innovation process through emotive and authentic stories that not only help contextualise our mission and values but generate a common understanding of what innovation is and who gets to be an innovator at UNHCR. These stories are critical for changing the culture of the organization and familiarising people with a vivid vision of innovation. We've written stories such as "Why innovators can come from all parts of the organization" to persuade others in UNHCR that regardless of where you sit in the organization—you too can be an innovator if you have the right mindset. Stories of persuasion such as "Innovation is about diversity and inclusion. Stop with the gimmicks, catch up." are disseminated to influence beliefs around innovation and to transport our vision of diversity to the centre of innovation initiatives. Creating a compelling vision is a key element for sustainable innovation across an organization—your vision needs to energise and compel others to move and act. Stories of innovation allow us to create this shared

vision and common understanding to introduce positive change.

2. Stories to diffuse or pitch ideas:

People love ideas, and innovators have many tools to prototype their novel products, services or processes. Storytelling offers a key framework to emotionally connect with your audience or decision makers. Instead of developing a Powerpoint presentation, create a story around your idea that people will yearn to retell. Move beyond a basic pitch and see how you can utilise the science of story-building to make your idea resonate and more memorable for your target audience.

3. Stories to capture bright spots:

At UNHCR, we talk a lot about bright spots. For us, bright spots are the people who are on the frontline innovating—we exist to support them. Telling stories of others in the organization who are innovating can not only help people overcome anxieties and concern about various attributes of the innovation process. But it can make innovation more accessible. For example, we wrote a story about an Innovation Fellow in Zimbabwe who was experimenting with methods to bring refugee voices into our programmatic cycle, giving us a direct line of feedback into what was and what was not working for their community. Another colleague based in Turkey discovered this story and explained, "When I read this story about innovation, it was the first time that I felt like it was relevant to my work and something that we should all be incorporating into our day-to-day protection work." She then applied for the Innovation Fellowship and we welcomed her into our 2018 cohort. Storytelling is key for building understanding and engagement for innovation across UNHCR.

4. Stories as a road map for behaviour change:

At the Innovation Service, we believe that strategic communications can be used to not only build support for innovation but also to change behaviours at a cultural level. Often, resistance to change is simply a lack of understanding of how to change. Innovation and experimentation can walk in lockstep with uncertainty, and with uncertainty comes ambiguity. We can use stories to script behaviours and create a pathway for innovation that is accessible for colleagues who may not know where to start. If you want to create an organization that breeds innovators, it is not enough to tell them "be innovative" or "be creative." Through detailed stories, we can tell them how they cultivate change.

For example, UNHCR Brazil has done an excellent job creating a culture for innovation within their operation. In the previous cohort of UNHCR's Innovation Fellows, three of the accepted twenty-five person cohort came from the operation during the height of its innovation activities. This was something we knew we needed to capture so other UNHCR operations could learn from their experience. We documented the behaviours and actions of Senior Management to Protection Officers to understand how we could script the critical moves through storytelling. Through telling the story of why innovation took office in UNHCR's Brazil operation, we're confident it will create a pathway for other offices to recreate their recipe for creativity. Stories can inspire others to learn more, do more and take the road less travelled.

5. Stories to build knowledge and educate:

What we've seen at UNHCR is that innovation is not always accessible to our 15,000 colleagues across the world. Storytelling is an extremely valuable tool to challenge the notion that innovation is only technology and to build knowledge about what the innovation process looks like in practise. Instead of relying simply on facts, we've used a story of a young refugee in Tindouf, Algeria who built a new shelter structure out of water bottles to illustrate that innovation can come in all forms based on the needs of a community. Stories also allow us to capture lessons learned around experimenting at UNHCR and how to build knowledge around what works and what doesn't. Ultimately, our learning has greater value when we share it and reading a humanitarian innovation story is more inspirational than another report.

6. Stories to understand the past:

Innovation is rarely straightforward, and a lack of institutional memory can reinforce the status-quo. Through storytelling, we can capture the long-dormant seeds of innovation's past and guide others through the trials and tribulations of the innovators who came before us. If people in the humanitarian sector don't see how much has already changed, they can fall into the trap of believing that they can't challenge current norms. If we look at the evolution of cash-based interventions in displaced communities, we can clearly see how willing the sector is to adapt to the standard way of working. Additionally, cash-based interventions have challenged how the humanitarian sector thinks about dignity and the power of choice for refugee communities.

7. Stories to explore the future or the unknown:

Science fiction creates pictures of what the future can be by inviting us to climb into the story and explore the future before it happens. Star Trek is a great example of science fiction inspiring future technological innovations—the Star Trek "Hello Computer" long preceded Apple's Siri or wireless headsets. There is an essay written in 1945 by Vannevar Bush where he envisions what we now call a personal computer. This extraordinarily prophetic essay imagines not only new technology but the relationship we will have with the information and knowledge it keeps, and with one another.

Stories allow us to gaze into what our future could look like, and the norms and beliefs pulsing through it. What would the culture of UNHCR look like if every Senior Manager created space for staff to innovate? In the article, "Why cultural change has to accompany our renewed

investment in data" Chris Earney, the Head of the Innovation Service, imagines UNHCR as a more agile and efficient organization at the forefront of proactive, evidence-based humanitarian response. The story of what this culture could look like and why it matters to refugees is supported by clear actions to reimagine that future together. We can also use storytelling to take a sociocultural approach to work with communities and create alternative futures where they are the decision makers. We may not be able to predict the future but this branch of storytelling enables us to extrapolate and forecast a rich connected picture of possibilities for innovation.

> "The story of innovation, as it is typically told, is one of rule breakers, stay-up-all-nighters, people who are sharper and shinier than everyone else–whiz kids. And those whiz kids all look the same. Young. Male. Techies or policy wonks or numbers geniuses."

But storytelling also needs innovation

So now you're convinced—storytelling is a key tool for driving innovation. But I believe we need to go beyond the stories that are being told now. The stories we are telling also need innovation.

While in some cases people may not understand how innovation relates to their work, in other instances people simply don't believe they can be an innovator. To change our organizational culture at UNHCR we need to question the paradigm of who gets to be an innovator. We have to tell stories to steward our culture forward. We have to tell stories to demystify the role of creativity and innovation in people's day-to-day lives. This experience of creativity has historically not been accessible to the many because someone once spoke of its false innateness. We have to tell stories that value the virtue of inquisitiveness and reward the merit of curiosity. There are too many people cast out from the innovation conversation before they can contribute to it because they are expected to be in some way special or original. The false shadow of the lone inventor frightens people outside the creative experience. We have to tell stories that depict creativity as accessible and curiosity as a friend we can always revisit.

We also have to recognise the cultural variations in what people expect to see in stories—how can we use innovation to speak across cultures whether that is through speech, gestures, or drawing stories.

We need to tell better stories. We need to tell more inclusive stories. We need to tell stories about the intersectional spaces, the complexity of systems and the nuances of the human experience.

We need to question who has been telling our innovation stories and why. We need to question who is telling the refugee story and how they are benefiting from controlling this narrative. We need to understand the power dynamic of storytelling and more importantly, who has a voice at the table when we're talking about innovation.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discusses the danger of a single story in her famous Ted Talk and how we risk a critical misunderstanding by limiting ourselves to simplified narratives. She states, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

And this is true for the spaces in which we operate as well. We can't have a single story of innovation. We can't limit ourselves to one story structure, one face or one voice. We can't allow the cliches or stereotypes to filter our stories for so long that they become the perceived norm. We have to build stories of failure alongside our journeys of success. We need stories that move us towards each other, not farther apart. We need stories that not only set new standards but challenge us to live up to them."

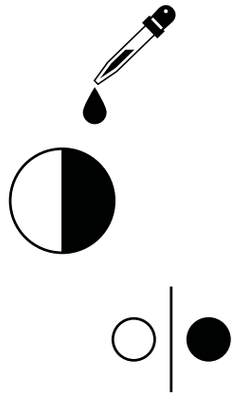
We need stories of innovators as diverse as the world we inhabit. We need, we crave, a thousand different stories on how innovation can improve our organization and the lives of displaced communities. Storytelling and innovation should exist symbiotically. They can be mutually beneficial to one another in the desired future we wish to build. Instead of an afterthought, let's bring innovation to the forefront of how these stories are being told—in their most complex yet accessible versions.

As author Maria Popova so eloquently states,

"A great story, then, is not about providing information, though it can certainly inform—a great story invites an expansion of understanding, a self-transcendence. More than that, it plants the seed for it and makes it impossible to do anything but grow a new understanding—of the world, of our place in it, of ourselves, of some subtle or monumental aspect of existence."

So yes, innovation needs storytelling, but I would argue that storytelling needs innovation just a little bit more.

How UNHCR Brazil harnessed the power of innovation



What does innovation look like in a rapidly changing environment—and once you have a definition in your hands, how do you use innovation to carry your work forward? And does that definition change in the face of an unfolding emergency? To explore these questions, we took a close look at the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) operation in Brazil, where a number of innovative initiatives have prospered in recent years. What were the factors that drove that innovation and helped it succeed? And how can Brazil's efforts be replicated by other country operations?

Recognising the urgent call to respond to intensifying humanitarian needs worldwide with creative, collaborative solutions, UNHCR is committed to creating a culture of innovation. Understanding exactly what innovation means is essential to infusing it into every area of UNHCR's work.

Consider, for example, Raizes da Cozinha (Roots in the Kitchen), a gastronomy entrepreneurship project of UNHCR Brazil partner Migraflix. According to Camila Sombra, a Durable Solutions Assistant at UNHCR Brazil, the partnership provided a direct response to a specific challenge: organizations like Migraflix want to support refugee integration and access to sustainable livelihoods, but often don't have the resources to do so on a significant scale.

Partnering with UNHCR and others helped Migraflix build a more robust, strategic project. Raizes da Cozinha provides entrepreneurship opportunities for displaced people and gives them training to open their own restaurant or catering businesses, while raising awareness of refugee issues among the Brazilian public. What began as a pilot project in 2017 is expected to involve more than 100 participants in 2019.

"When we talk about innovation we normally think of something digital, so at first I didn't think I had a good example of innovation among the projects I have been working with," Sombra says. "But innovation can be seen as a new way of providing responses to issues that we have already identified, but we were not able to tackle. Innovation means developing tools and expertise that enable us to provide broader responses to needs."

Swimming against the stream of assumptions

Sombra is not alone in her initial impression of innovation as being exclusive to technology. It's one of the many assumptions people make when they hear the word "innovation." But having experienced the spirit of innovation that runs through UNHCR Brazil—inspiring new approaches to solving age-old problems—she has a much different viewpoint now.

According to Emilia Saarelainen, Manager of UNHCR's Innovation Fellowship Programme—which develops UNHCR staff's innovation skills and supports them in facilitating innovation with colleagues, partners, and refugees in their own operations—it's natural for people to associate innovation with technology. After all, technology innovations like 3D printers are concrete and very visible examples of one kind of innovation. But creating sustainable innovation at UNHCR and beyond requires embracing the less tangible aspects of innovation too.

"People typically think innovation is about technology or ideas," says Saarelainen. "Innovation is about both of those things, to some degree, but it is about much more than that. An idea is only the beginning. Innovation is about how you put those ideas into action in a way that creates value."

At UNHCR, innovation is centered around people and processes. As Saarelainen explains, sustainable innovation requires people who will put processes into action to solve problems and achieve an operation's goals—and those processes aren't linear, which can create challenges. That's one of many reasons that innovation is a team effort, because people engaged in the process of innovation must be willing to ride the waves of each project as it evolves.

In fact, the prevailing myth of a lone "hero" who saves the day with a bright idea may be one of the biggest misconceptions about innovation there is.

"We have this picture of the 'lightbulb moment' of a single individual, but it's rarely like that," Saarelainen says. "Especially in an organization like UNHCR that's hierarchical and bureaucratic, we don't only talk about the creative type who comes up with the big ideas then leaves the scene. That's where the work starts: someone must test and develop the idea and finally push the idea through, which takes a collaborative effort. The people working together as a team are really the innovation heroes."

So what is in the water in Brazil that has made innovation catch on across the operation?

Although some of the drivers of innovation in Brazil were specific to the country's culture and the operation's immediate needs, many of the other principles applied in Brazil—such as community-based engagement, collaboration, an appreciation for diversity and inclusion, and supportive leadership—can be replicated at other UNHCR operations.

Principle 1: Turning a drought of resources into a cascade of solutions

In many ways, Brazil's rapid adoption of innovation was a case of necessity being the mother of invention, as the saying goes.

Although Brazil doesn't have the highest number of refugees across UNHCR, the population of displaced people seeking protection in Brazil is at an all-time high, specifically with the influx of asylum seekers from Venezuela beginning in 2017. What was once an operation with one small office and one satellite location, with a total staff of about 25 people, has grown to include five field offices across Brazil with a staff of almost 100.

"We went from a very quiet operation to emergency mode, so at the same time we are growing and struggling to offer better services, we have been very open to innovative solutions," says Luiz Fernando Godinho, a Spokesperson for UNHCR Brazil.

"It happened very quickly and I think that's one of the reasons UNHCR Brazil is so committed to innovation," adds Diego Nardi, a former Durable Solutions Assistant in Brazil who is now a Associate Protection Officer (Community Based Protection) in Ecuador and a current Innovation Fellow. "When we do this kind of work with low resources, we need to be very creative about the solutions we create."

The culture in Brazil is another factor, Nardi says. A history of resistance to dictatorship has influenced a deep commitment to civil society, and there's a strong legal framework in place to assist refugees and asylum seekers.

"The people in Brazil who are interested in the refugee agenda are very focused on inclusion and diversity and empathy, which is the mindset needed to push innovation forward," he explains. "This also reflects the community-based approach that is a policy across UNHCR."

UNHCR's community-based approach aims to intentionally involve refugees in accelerating solutions for their own protection and integration in collaboration with UNHCR and their host community. This approach in itself is a significant driver of innovation.

"In times of unprecedented crisis we need an unprecedented response, and that's going to require an innovative mindset," explains Vinicius Feitosa, a former Senior Protection Assistant in São Paulo who is now an Associate Research and Information Officer in Copenhagen and also a current Innovation Fellow.

It's notable that three of the current cohort of 25 Innovation Fellows came from the Brazil operation, having worked under Isabel Marquez, who was the country Representative—the highest level of country leadership—during the operation's period of rapid growth. The Programme's application process is rigorous and highly selective, so having such a high percentage of participants from a single country reflects the operation's commitment to innovation.

"We need to implement new solutions with a human-centered approach," Feitosa adds, "and it's very inspiring to feel connected to the community with a shared mindset of reframing the problem and trying something new."

Principle 2: A rising tide lifts all boats

The spirit of community-based engagement was exemplified by a project called Creatathon, a partnership between UNHCR Brazil, Google, Impact Hub, and Migraflix, which began taking shape in 2016.

"We wanted to create a structured approach to having an open discussion between refugees and locals about the main problems we needed to solve," Feitosa says. "It was obvious early on that we, as a group, had a very good understanding of the problems, but we needed to create ideas and experiment with solutions."

This experimentation was carried out through a series of workshops during which refugees mapped their most pressing demands, along with local entrepreneurs and technology developers who collectively created solutions for those problems. The workshops covered topics such as design thinking, business models, and client development, and led to the creation of a number of solutions.

All of the solutions were focused on giving refugees access to reliable information and integration tools. For one project, participants built on an initiative that was already underway within UNHCR's Innovation Service: help.unhcr.org, a global website that provides information on protection and integration for refugees.

While UNHCR Brazil prepared to launch its version of the platform in 2018, Creatathon participants brainstormed ways to take the initiative one step further, and started developing a network of supporters to the program.

"The website is more mature now, with lots of countries involved, and Brazil now has a consultant working full-time to scale up community engagement around the website," Feitosa says. "I think this initiative has inspired our operation to continue to look for innovative methods of incorporating refugees' voices and mindsets in the work we do."

Principle 3: Community engagement creates a wellspring of innovation

Innovation doesn't have to be as highly visible as Creatathon was. Smaller community-based projects also make a significant

impact on achieving an operation's goals. One excellent example is UNHCR Brazil's partnership with Télécoms Sans Frontières (Telecoms Without Borders), which was established in response to the influx of refugees from Venezuela. The emergency required UNHCR to quickly rethink the environment in which it operates to respond to the needs of asylum seekers. Télécoms Sans Frontières, an NGO that specialises in technology and telecommunications for humanitarian crises, approached UNHCR and together they initiated a pilot to provide free telephone calls to refugees living in UNHCR settlements.

"It was such a relief for displaced people be able to contact their families and let them know their journey to Brazil ended well, and to coordinate if they have family in other parts of Brazil so they can be reunited," says Flavia Faria, Senior Public Information Assistant in the UNHCR Field Unit in Boa Vista. "The project with Télécoms Sans Frontières has now grown to multiple shelters and a fixed space at a local university near our office, where refugees can go to receive orientation about the procedures for asylum and temporary residence claims, apply for social benefits, and attend Portuguese language classes. The project has potential to grow and inspire others."

Innovation was equally important to the creation of the Young Professionals Program, a project launched in 2017 that extends an opportunity to refugee youth that was already available to Brazilian youth. A law in Brazil requires large companies to hire a certain number of young professionals between the ages of 14 and 24. Refugees are allowed to participate but were often overlooked, perhaps because they didn't speak Portuguese well enough.

In 2016, a group of unaccompanied refugee youth arrived in São Paulo, and with the approval of the country's justice system, they were eager to begin working to support themselves. UNHCR Brazil connected with an advocacy group called Mulheres do Brasil (Women of Brazil), which suggested that UNHCR organize a group of asylum seekers and refugees who would participate in a two-month course to prepare them for employment opportunities. The course was delivered by an established educational institute, Instituto Techmail, with scholarships provided by private companies. After the success of the first course, the institute now reserves four spots for refugees and asylum seekers in every class of 30 it hosts a few times each year.

"Managers must create the structure and space for true collaboration, and leaders need to set the tone for a collaborative culture," says Saarelainen. "This includes letting the team know that failure is okay—it's part of the process of trying something new."

"This project helped change my mind about the way we work with refugees," Sombra explains. "Instead of thinking of them simply as refugees, now we also see them as young people, as people with disabilities, as LGBTI people—Brazil has well-developed policies for these groups. Now we no longer have to do something just for refugees, but we can include them in a mixed group of Brazilians so they integrate and make friends and can take advantage of ongoing opportunities that already exist."

Principle 4: Leadership steers the team toward innovation

For innovation to thrive as it does in Brazil, the entire operation needs to be supportive and engaged, which begins at the highest levels of leadership.

"Managers must create the structure and space for true collaboration, and leaders need to set the tone for a collaborative culture," says Saarelainen. "This includes letting the team know that failure is okay—it's part of the process of trying something new."

At UNHCR Brazil, leadership has demonstrated a keen understanding of the importance of innovation and its willingness to give the team opportunities to collaborate and experiment with new ideas. Marquez, who is now Deputy Director for UNHCR's Regional Bureau for the Americas, is recognised as a true champion of innovation, especially during her time as Representative in Brazil.

"She empowers people to have a vision, and I think this is a game-changer in innovation," says Feitosa. "Isabel has been a mentor to me and so many people in the operation. She set the tone by making innovation one of her priorities, which is a powerful message coming from a manager. It forces people to not only think of different solutions but to look at the problem in a different way."

Nardi agrees, noting that rather than micromanaging the team, Marquez trusted them to move forward with any good ideas they presented. Often, he says, an effective leader will create this kind of team-based engagement without thinking of it as being innovative—but that leadership style is crucial to sustainable innovation.

"Isabel's trust and empowerment was very important for the operation to grow so fast and keep our motivation to innovate," he explains. "She included everyone in the operation in the process of creating and implementing new ideas. When people know their ideas will be taken into account, they will participate. Senior management recognised the work everyone was doing, and people are motivated by this and by seeing the results of their efforts."

Opening the floodgates for innovation across UNHCR

The same principles UNHCR Brazil used to establish a sustainable culture of innovation can be applied by every UNHCR operation to create their own wave of innovation.

What's more, people who move around the global organization—a common practise across UNHCR—can bring the principles of innovation with them to their new assignments. Innovation Fellows, in particular, play a significant role in this.

"The innovation mindset is something I am really carrying in my heart, in everything I'm doing with UNHCR," says Feitosa. "Especially because I'm connected with many colleagues who are doing amazing work in the field, it's very powerful to be part of a community of people who share this mindset."

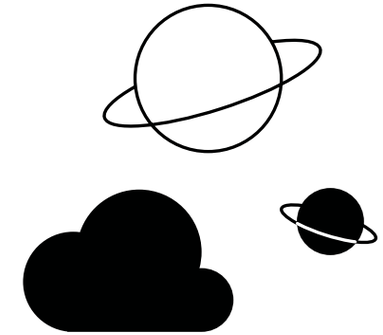
Having been assigned to three different countries in the last year or so, Nardi also has first-hand experience in the value of spreading innovation from one country to the next.

"International colleagues bring new views and you can benefit from them, and they'll have other ways of working with partners, with the private sector, with the government," he explains. "They will bring their best experience and we can all take inspiration from that."

Across UNHCR, the pursuit of innovation will continue, with a commitment to embracing new ways that innovation can manifest in practise. After all, innovation means being nimble and adapting to the shifting tides of humanitarian needs—and catching the big fish requires flexibility and openness.

"Creating the kind of behaviour and culture change that will make a measurable impact on UNHCR and our mission means continually finding innovative ways to think and work together," Saarelainen says. "When people are enthusiastic and willing to take initiative—and accept feedback that can improve on their idea, which might mean doing something differently—that's how innovation happens."

Investing in People, Not Projects: A look at UNHCR's experimental funding



There were a lot of questions to be answered by UNHCR's new Innovation Fund. What could people in field operations come up with if they had a blank slate and the cash to carry it out? Would their ideas add up to actual gains for refugee protection and assistance?

Launched for the first time in June 2016, UNHCR's Innovation Fund is a resource that field operations can use to prototype or scale up good practices and test out creative ideas. The Fund, created with an initial USD 3 million from the IKEA Foundation, has created a safe budgetary space that enables field operations to experiment and take risks without having to deprioritize other areas of work. The offer of support the Fund presented was an immediately popular one. The Innovation Fund received more than 100 applications in two weeks. Some were just fledgling ideas, while others were very well defined, and ready to prototype.

Chris Earney and Dina Zyadeh, who were leading the selection and disbursement of the Innovation Fund, say five years ago, the Innovation Service would not have seen such a high level of enthusiasm with regards to innovation.

"We recognize that UNHCR has always been innovating, but the added value of the Innovation Service is that we facilitate the provision of additional resources…whether it's funding or expertise from external partners that people need to succeed," says Zyadeh, the Associate Innovation Officer (Operations). "The call for proposals illustrated how great the appetite for innovation is within our organization",

What is innovative?

Something Earney noticed when he began reviewing applications for the fund was that everyone has a different idea about what kinds of projects are innovative. For some, introducing a new crop to farmers was innovative. To others, innovation meant launching a new food festival to help promote integration and acceptance of refugees in Europe. With field officers operating in so many disparate contexts, Earney says that varied understanding is a good thing, and encourages people to think about what innovation means to them.

"Innovation is very personal," he says. "It is something that should be applicable to different operations in different ways, and it is about that creativity and ability to think differently about a challenge."

The Innovation Fund ended up allocating USD 1.2 million to applicants across twenty-eight countries. "Just to have the range of proposals that we received was mind blowing," Earney says. "Honestly, I was not expecting to have so many, and the range of projects and the creativity that was involved with all of them, if you take the local context into account…(was extremely) impressive."

Jean-Laurent Martin, an Information Management Officer in Zaatari, Jordan, had already prototyped his idea when he applied to the Fund. He had spent a while reflecting on some of the problems in Zaatari camp; refugees there lacked opportunities for both education and cash for work, and wanted to participate more in the camp decision-making processes. And with 80,000 people in the camp, UNHCR, other agencies, and refugees themselves found it hard to get up-to-date and complete information about activities and services.

He believed he could simultaneously address these problems and more by training pre-selected refugees on geo-information management and letting them help design products used to make decisions in the camp. Having the funding was key. With $48,000 from the Innovation Fund, Jean-Laurent Martin was able to create a computer/GIS lab with specific hardware, mapping software and generator, pay a teacher to provide training on GIS mapping to qualified refugees, and provide cash for work for those engaged on the project.

The Innovation Service provided technical advice, secure support, and plenty of feedback when it came to monitoring and evaluation—helping him draft smarter, more measurable performance indicators, for example. But it also gave him space to innovate. "We're in a specific context, we're in a camp, we have a lot of specific problems to solve and they know that and let you do the work," Jean-Laurent Martin says.

Refugees are now being compensated for the work they do collecting, analyzing and creating maps with information such as facilities, youth services, and other products that are reflecting Community needs or issues. Jean-Laurent Martin is confident that the refugees participating in the RefugeGIS project will be able to find better jobs in the future. Those refugees seem to think so too. Jean-Laurent says when they first showed up to apply for the training and jobs they seemed downcast and despondent.

"I remember when I interviewed refugees for selection for training in information management," Martin says. "It's tough to be in the situation in the camp for years. They seemed sad. Now they seem much more hopeful and happy, excited about the future."

As for Jean-Laurent Martin, he's optimistic about the future of the project even after the Innovation Fund is no longer involved. After all, the project actually saves UNHCR serious money they would have paid to partners to collect, analyze and map camp information. The team of refugees can do it at a lower cost with more accurate information and reap the rewards of community empowerment as they do.

An experiment for UNHCR

If there were any doubts about the innovative approach of using a fund for projects in UNHCR operations, consider this: Neither the IKEA Foundation nor UNHCR had any confirmation that the approach would work. Beyond the fact that each project could succeed to some degree or fail, it bears recognizing that the whole process is a trial.

"This in itself is an experiment, and…people who participate in the Innovation Fund or even submitted proposals are part of a larger experiment, in order to see whether we are servicing the needs of UNHCR and our partners in improving assistance," Earney says.

"This in itself is an experiment, and…people who participate in the Innovation Fund or even submitted proposals are part of a larger experiment, in order to see whether we are servicing the needs of UNHCR and our partners in improving assistance," Earney says.

In essence, UNHCR agreed to prototype the IKEA Foundation funded UNHCR Innovation Fund on itself. The approach itself was an experiment to understand

the true impact of seed funding and creating a budgetary space for UNHCR staff to innovate.

“We will give feedback and analysis back to the IKEA Foundation and decide if this is something useful for refugee protection and assistance or whether it’s not, and we’re completely agnostic with this,” Earney says. “You have to practice what you preach, right? We’ll be the ones happy to be the guinea pigs.”

With this honest emphasis on figuring out what works, measurement is a huge piece of the puzzle. Each project must develop its own performance indicators, and the Innovation Service will collect overall data on the effectiveness of the fund. Then, something that intimidates some: complete honesty.

The Innovation Service plans to communicate total openness with the IKEA Foundation about the impact of its funding, the way it was managed, and how that can be translated into improvements.

“I want to see impact with the projects we’ve invested in,” Earney says. “I want to be able to measure the impact it’s had on refugee and host communities. I want to be able to provide our management with some pretty agnostic guidance on the utility of this sort of fund. And…if the data tells us there is impact – I want to see us do a better fund next year.”

That kind of relationship with the IKEA Foundation means it is truly a partner and not just a donor. And this kind of open, honest, and deeply connected partnership is itself a cultural shift for UNHCR—one the organization is becoming more open to.

“They want bigger impact on refugees’ lives with every Euro they invest,” says Earney. “They want to be involved in the projects, they want to be involved in the fund, and they want to have more of a role than just the money.”

Supporting refugee-led innovation and “a crazy idea”

Juliette Murekeyisoni received a WhatsApp message from a Sahrawi refugee living in Awserd camp, with a photo of a house made out of recycled materials. A refugee youth in one of the five camps in Tindouf, Algeria, where Murekeyisoni works as a Senior Field Coordinator, had constructed it out of plastic bottles filled with sand, egg cartons, and all sorts of other recyclables for his grandmother—as a way to ease the grinding summer heat and ward off the sandstorms, winds, and winter cold.

His construction looked solid, and as he had a background in energy efficiency, Murekeyisoni thought the young man might actually be on to something. “I need to visit this house,” she thought. Two days later, the call for innovation proposals came out from the Innovation Fund. Murekeyisoni got moving. She called her colleagues (the Shelter Officer and a Field Associate), asked them to come with her to visit the house, and spent the whole day asking questions and sweating in the 50-degree Celsius heat. Together they went straight back to her house to draft the application into the late hours.

Murekeyisoni thought the young man’s idea was genius. It could mean building houses that would not succumb to the flooding that decimated mud adobe homes the year before. It could provide jobs for Sahrawi youth who are highly educated but strikingly underemployed. And it could work to clean the environment as refugees would collect recyclables for use in constructing these innovative new structures.

Murekeyisoni crossed her fingers and submitted her proposal to the Innovation Fund, the only option she saw for getting started on a project like this one. “If I ask for money for building a plastic bottle house, the office would have looked at me like I was crazy,” she says. “I don’t think I could have convinced my Head of Sub the Office at the time to allocate money for this project.” The Innovation Fund saw things differently.

“They’re looking for innovations,” Murekeyisoni says. “They are looking for new things – it doesn’t mean you have to do them properly 100 percent. It may work, it may not work. If it doesn’t work, ok fine. We tried.”

“With innovation, you have to start somewhere,” she says. “People will criticize, they will call you a crazy lady. But for me it didn’t matter…what is important to me is the outcome of the project and the confidence that this young refugee developed through the whole process. I am results-oriented and you never know until you try.”

The result of Murekeyisoni’s Innovation Fund-supported project was the construction of 25 homes. The team, which included 125 paid refugee youth, built them for refugees living with mental, physical, and/or other disabilities. The designs are now in high demand within and even outside the camp.

Murekeyisoni knows of two young men, who started a shop with the proceeds they earned from building these houses. They now have a sustainable source of income and are hoping to build a store out of plastic bottles.

Whether the overall project continues to be successful or not, Murekeyisoni is completely on board with the expectation that she’ll report back honestly. “I told Dina and Chris, we have nothing to hide. All the success and failures, I will tell you,” she says. “And this is innovation. It’s something you do: it may work and it may not work, but alhamdulillah, as they say here, this one was successful.”

Beyond her own initiative, Murekeyisoni is encouraged that UNHCR seems increasingly committed to a mandate that goes farther than just protection.

“Our normal way of working has been always to ensure that refugee are safe, have shelter, education, water, food and

medication. For the last couple of years we've also been engaging refugees in planning of the activities and in decision making towards their lives," she says. "We don't tell our people of concern what to do. We listen to them and develop projects together, keeping their ideas and needs in mind."

"The self-importance and dignity that refugees get, and feel, is just as important as giving them food and water to drink."

Investing in projects, investing in people

Starting to administer the fund late in the programme year posed a challenge, especially for such a small team. And given the bureaucracy of the organization, nearly every project struggled at some point with procurement or budgeting. Then there was the rigorous evaluation demanded of recipients, who had to develop their own set of key performance indicators.

But no matter the project outcomes, the Fund has already achieved something important in the way it has allowed staff to grow and develop, building their confidence and innovative problem-solving skills. Sometimes just connecting them to someone with good ideas and experience outside UNHCR has made a difference in the way they approach their work.

Murekeyisoni, for example, used the innovation approach she learned while working with the Innovation Service on an agricultural project in another community, and applied that to the recyclable housing project described above.

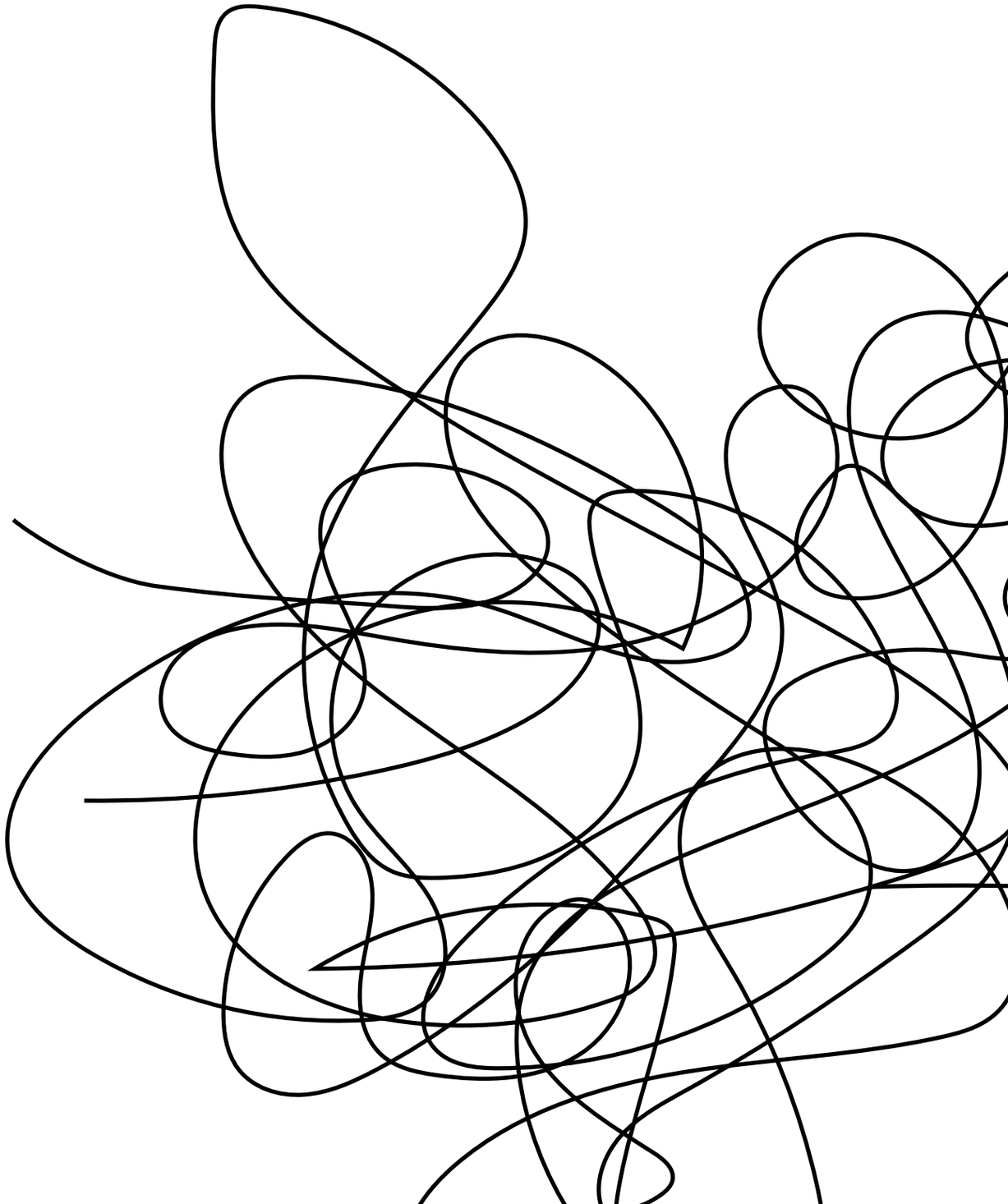
"It's amazing to see how this has contributed to their development as staff," Zyadeh says. "It comes down to people. You're not only investing in the projects, you're investing in the people who are implementing them."

The architecture of the Innovation Fund was designed to build capacity, not replace it. The funding itself, however, poses more of a question.

"There's a bit of a dichotomy here," says Earney. "We want field operations to invest their own money in innovations; we don't want it to be something that we run solely from Headquarters. But sometimes you just need to kick-start things."

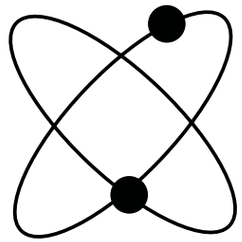
Earney hopes the Innovation Fund will catalyze an appetite for experimentation so that operations begin investing their own resources when it comes time to scale projects. If the innovation projects generate measurable value, they'll have a strong case for continued resourcing in the future.

The same goes for the Innovation Fund.



TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Weaving innovation through UNHCR's bureaucracy



The car had been travelling for over three hours; its wheels churning up patches of red mud as it moved along the path. Inside the vehicle, a team from UNHCR's Innovation Service observed the landscape's mountainous terrain. They were on their way to a refugee camp where a creative education project had taken root.

That day, students were once again waiting around for another mission from a far away country to visit their school. They welcomed the group from UNHCR and explained why this programme specifically had made a difference in their lives, and with excitement told the team how they too believed that this opportunity, a pathway to potential employment, should be given to more refugees.

UNHCR's Innovation Service and Education teams have been supporting the project's transition to scale, along with four other projects, through the Humanitarian Education Accelerator (HEA)—a joint initiative of UNHCR, UNICEF, and the UK Department for International Development. Together, the partners are working to accelerate the scaling efforts of promising education programmes like this one by providing field offices and partner organizations with tools to improve data collection activities through mentorship, financing and capacity building.

In order to scale, the five education innovations want to collect data about how they operate, evaluate the effectiveness of their education strategy and build evidence about how the programme is impacting students' lives.

It's a powerful concept that would not only assist the NGO in refining its scaling strategy, but also provide the humanitarian community with highly coveted insights about education innovations in emergency contexts. However, as with all new ideas, the rollout of the HEA would present a challenge that underlies everyone's biggest fear: bureaucracy.

The truth is, the team was there to find a solution to an issue that had been delaying the start of the research. Innovation in this context was going to be about overcoming systems that were, perhaps, not as agile and progressive as they needed to be, including culture, mindsets, and processes.

Turning a mountain into a molehill

Like a splinter lodged in an unsuspecting toe or finger, sometimes the smallest problems cause the most discomfort. In the case of this project, it wasn't a splinter, but a car. The NGO running the education programme had accumulated a hefty transport bill from making regular visits to the camp and needed a budget-friendly alternative to making the lengthy trek toward the operation site. Their solution was simple: buy a car.

Though it was clearly understood that a car would be a useful tool that would assist in the delivery of project activities, the UNHCR team needed to follow due process as laid out in their standard operating procedures. They normally lease cars to their partners for the duration of specific projects and—despite it being significantly more affordable to buy the car—didn't feel comfortable authorising the vehicle purchase, as it was not in line with their processes.

The leasing option was in line with UNHCR rules, but it was not the most cost-effective option for the partner. It would end up costing them more money in the long run, without the benefit of keeping the car after the project's completion. In these cases, should the partner's needs be placed over UNHCR policies and procedures?

This led to a lot of frustration for all involved in order to find a resolution that would make the best use of the funding available. In the end, the pursuit for the car had to be abandoned so that the HEA project could start, but the situation serves as a useful lesson for future endeavors.

Whether it's a car, a computer or solar lighting, the Innovation Service has learnt, that in these situations, the need to have flexible and agile funding in today's changing humanitarian landscape is paramount to allow them to innovate. The rules, structures, and processes that are put in place to limit risk should be respected, however, perhaps it is also time to ask: Do these rules still serve in the best interest of those we are trying to assist? Do we need to think about re-interpreting the rules in different ways, or perhaps re-writing the rules altogether if this is a bottleneck being faced across all operations?

"The scope of the HEA is not as physical—in the real sense of the word," said Salva, who leads financial and administrative activities at the Innovation Service. "What I see is that operations tend to prioritise, or place more emphasis on, projects that are more straightforward: they build a camp; they build a school. The HEA is a concept: scaling education. It's not something you can touch with your hands, and I think that's the problem here."

This was a challenge that Clara, who manages the HEA programme under UNHCR, had witnessed within the organization and with additional partners. For her,

communication was always key to the success of the project.

“Establishing clear communication on the intent of new initiatives, and ensuring the correct people are involved from the start will go a long way in ensuring that overcoming bureaucratic hurdles is a thing of the past,” Clara mentioned. In as much as innovation can be flashy, a large part is also working together with people to shift mindsets and improve internal processes.

During their end-of-year missions, the Innovation team invited all parties involved to discuss the research and recap the year’s successes and shortcomings—a tactic that brought the field office and partner closer together. Though the Innovation team sparked the conversation, they encouraged the field office and partner to keep the momentum going by holding monthly meetings, sharing monthly briefings and inviting each other to special events. With more direct and frequent interaction, the UNHCR country team’s have gained a better understanding of the HEA’s vision, which is no longer just a construct from HQ. Ensuring that its implementation could continue without UNHCR’s lengthy processes getting in the way.

Killing two birds with one stone—or not

Hundreds of kilometers east, another HEA project faced similar gridlock. The project partner in this country runs its education programme in two refugee camps. Given that the research would be looking at the impact of the intervention holistically and would be managed at the HQ level, the expectation was to write one project proposal agreement for both camps.

In order to scale, the five education innovations want to collect data about how they operate, evaluate the effectiveness of their education strategy and build evidence about how the programme is impacting students’ lives.

In reality, to split data collection activities between the two camps, two separate project agreements were needed. This meant that the partner had to write two separate budgets, two project narratives and invest double the manpower for the financial reporting of what was essentially the same project. This was another process in which innovative approaches to simplify the work for the project partner should be established.

The project was understood differently across the two camps, which were located on opposite ends of the country. While the development of the partnership agreement went smoothly in one camp, it was a slightly different story in the second camp. Halfway through the second year of the programme, the project agreement had finally been signed, and the research initiative was up and running. But when it was time to renew the project proposal, a changeover in staff ushered in new staff who had not been part of the initial negotiation process, and had not yet had a lot of contact with the project as a result.

As mentioned in the previous example, in order for novel ideas to take root, all stakeholders need to have a full understanding of what is trying to be achieved. Although the partner took the time to explain the intervention—why it is being implemented, where the funding was coming from and how it had been administered—the process still resulted in delays in signing the project agreement.

From the partner’s perspective, it was difficult to imagine how one research project could generate such different reactions from within the same organization. In hindsight, the arrival of new staff was an opportunity to instill the value of research which would help to understand how to scale programmes better. Clara encourages coordinators of future programmes to take that opportunity.

“When we have a programme that we know does not fit the mold, we need to take that extra effort, take the time to re-explain and re-engage rather than place that burden on the project partner,” explained Clara.

At UNHCR, staff changeovers are common and happen often. Looking back, the Innovation team could have foreseen these challenges and taken a more proactive approach at addressing them.

Although other changes served the project positively. At the Innovation Service, where siloed labs had previously provided the team structure, a new multifunction team approach enabled opportunities for more people to collaborate on the HEA. The Innovation Service recognised that with the simplified structure, a new space for integrated support was created. Future programmes will be able to lean on a much wider range of experiences, in order to ensure that learning and capacity building in new approaches can be targeted throughout frequent staff turnovers and changes in the team structure of a programme.

Square peg, round hole

The HEA is a misfit project in some respects. By UNHCR standards, it doesn’t fit the mold. Not just figuratively, but literally. With its long-term approach to research and emphasis on capacity building, the project was not compatible with the corporate tools. Projects entered into the system need to be categorised using the software’s predetermined objectives and indicators, but the available options didn’t encompass the scope of the HEA project.

The way UNHCR understands and delivers humanitarian aid has evolved over the past 70 years. Realising it is not enough to meet refugees’ basic needs, the organization is placing greater focus on providing them with opportunities to thrive within their new communities. Projects like the HEA embody this new mindset by funding

research and data collection, but the systems used to manage their implementation do not.

While the organization may be encouraging a shift in humanitarian work, the bureaucracy is still lagging behind. These innovative programmes will be systematically seen as outliers and consequently face barriers to implementation if the bureaucracy does not reflect the organizations widened scope of work. This not only requires improved systems, but also a focus on training of staff who have to continuously deal with projects that are fitting more and more outside of the traditional scope.

Partnerships beyond money

In the nonprofit world, funding is a common problem—the lack thereof, that is—but for the HEA barriers have sprung up in the distribution, not the acquisition of funds.

Clara explains that challenges rolling out the project comes from the fact that the HEA is giving money for data-collection, research, and evaluation—all necessary ingredients to develop a successful scaling strategy but not traditionally considered priority items for delivering humanitarian aid.

Given that they work to fulfill the immediate needs of refugees, humanitarians must often think in the short term, and within UNHCR, only one year given the annual budgeting structure. While this approach maximises their impact on the ground, sometimes it may limit their ability to look into the future and understand how to effectively scale. If the HEA project is viewed through a short-term lens, research, monitoring and evaluation are seen as isolated actions that don't have an immediate impact on refugees. The focus needs to be on seeing these components as necessary tools to form promising, long-term strategies that will enable humanitarians to develop programmes that provide sustainable, long-term futures for refugees.

UNHCR's cumbersome budgeting process does little to make small funds specific to monitoring evaluation and research more attractive. In fact, one office went out of its way to avoid the process altogether. The team concluded it would be easier to charge project expenses directly to the Innovation Service budget line instead.

Another office decided to give the outdated process a try. To have the HEA funds transferred to their budget, they had to start by writing a budget committee memo. The memo has to be approved by many stakeholders before it is submitted to the budget committee for final approval. If we were to track the movement of this document, it would have definitely racked up some airmiles. As it travelled from the field offices, to the branch office, to the Desk Officer for two months—each one changing the numbers until an agreement was reached. When the memo was finally signed, they were told it had been done incorrectly and needed to be redone. This process could be made more agile by using electronic signature authorisations and ensuring that the figures could be made available for viewing by all parties concerned (from the field to HQ).

People are channeling their time and expertise into maneuvering the bureaucracy instead of using them to generate impact on the ground. Money allocation, budgeting, signatures are all a form of logistics in order to get the final project agreement between all stakeholders. They are a means to reach an end goal, and are not the end goal itself. But sometimes the breadth of administrative processes can make logistics feel like end goals in their own right.

As the HEA enters its final year, one of the partners has decided not to receive funding from the HEA in 2019. They will retain a partnership with UNHCR but prefer to seek funding outside the accelerator and avoid the bureaucratic budgeting structures. This unexpected change of plans will allow the Innovation team to bypass logistics and concentrate on adding value to the partner organization in other, impactful ways.

"What we learned from this is that giving money isn't the basis to form a strong partnership," Clara said. "Increasingly, our role is about coordination, strategy and facilitation. If a partner can achieve funding and sustainability from elsewhere, perhaps that's a success in itself."

Paving new paths for the future

Despite all the roadblocks and delays, the project teams have managed to roll out their research projects. Looking back at their trajectory, Salva encourages individual employees to cut through the organization's cumbersome processes by adopting a different mentality:

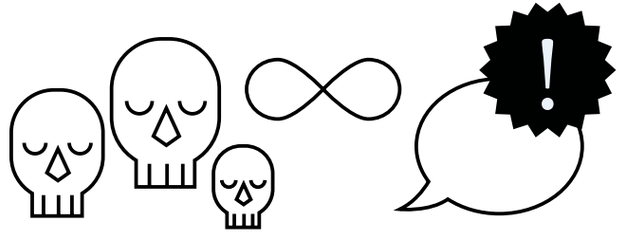
"In my opinion, the best way to approach it is to re-engage with all the rules we have set up, improve our financial systems and allow our staff to work in a more flexible way," Salva explained.

"Things can improve from a bureaucratic point of view if we allow people who know their work to bend the rules to achieve their main goal, paying less attention to details and looking at the bigger picture. We try to make the best of what we have at our disposal," he added. "Sometimes you end up doing a great job, other times you feel that you are not being given the tools to fulfill your work."

Overall, these colleagues at the Innovation Service feel the organization is moving in the right direction. They will take the lessons learned through the challenges encountered, and in 2019 try to do what they do best: innovate to ensure that these bureaucratic challenges become issues of the past, so that UNHCR as an organization can do better in the future.

Our Innovation Labs are dead. Long live innovation!

By Katie Drew, Former Emergency Lab Manager, now Innovation Officer



‘Peak Lab’

In an entirely ‘non-scientific poll’, the Centre for Impact asked respondents where different government ‘innovation initiatives’ sit on a so-called hype cycle. Respondents indicated that [policy] labs were the ‘peak of inflated expectations’. The next ‘looming’ step for these policy labs is dramatically framed by the Centre as: the ‘Trough of Disillusionment’. In this trough, we face the vast disparities between what has been ‘promised’ and what can feasibly be delivered. The conclusion: we are at ‘Peak Lab’. But, does this also apply to humanitarian innovation—are we also suffering similar disillusionment and lack of delivery?

In a conversation with DEVEX earlier this year Chris Fabian, co-founder of the Innovation Unit at the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), described how ‘The word innovation is dangerous, and the term innovation lab is doubly dangerous’. UNICEF has now deleted the term Innovation Lab from their innovation vocabulary. A Ground Truth solutions blog in September delivered a further, more damning, death blow to humanitarian innovation labs: ‘Absent a clear sense of direction, labs tend to focus on “innovation by gadget.”’ The growing backlash is clear. Keen not to jump blindly on the ‘no-labs bandwagon’, UNHCR’s Innovation Service wanted to establish what other modalities could work instead of the now beleaguered lab. However, on this journey, we realised we might not have had labs to begin with—recognising this leaves us in a better position for the future.

UNHCR Innovation Labs: an identity crisis

In its ‘Guide for Making Innovation Work’ the IBM Centre for the Business of Government details five different structural models that have been adopted by government offices in pursuit of Innovation. These are: Laboratory, Facilitator, Advisor, Technology-build-out and Liaison. Each has a functional description. A ‘Laboratory’ is an autonomous group charged with developing new technologies, products, fixes. This structural model description, and external interpretations of what ‘makes a lab’ has caused a mild identity crisis within UNHCR’s Innovation Service. We didn’t have laboratories. We are certainly not an autonomous group, guided by the organization’s mandate and working within the hierarchies of our structure. In fact, our stated aim is to ‘support a culture of creativity and collaboration across the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)’. We’d also strongly argue against the criticism of being ‘technology-driven’ and spent a substantial amount of 2017 debunking the ‘innovation is technology’ myth.

Returning to IBM’s guide, The Innovation Service finds greater resonance with the other structural models than with ‘Laboratory’. The model of Facilitator fits well for example: one person or small group working to convene government departments on internal improvements or external projects. Our UNHCR Innovation website even reflects this identity conflict: ‘We don’t consider ourselves innovators per se, but rather, the facilitators who bring innovation tools, and learning environments to those who require support, in order to help contribute to improvements in how UNHCR works’. So we didn’t need to ‘kill’ our Labs, but rather capitalise on ‘how’ to better facilitate innovation. How can we best address the criticism of Labs, and more broadly innovation, for refugees and the organization?

A new way-of-working

Just over a year ago the Harvard Business Review published consolidated scientific research on ‘Why Diverse Teams are Smarter’, summarising that diverse teams process facts better and are ‘more innovative’. In 2017, UNHCR’s Innovation Service began a process-change in the way it worked, based on this ‘diversity’ assumption. Project teams began working outside the constructed silos of ‘Labs’. Practically speaking, this saw us mirror a common way-of-working in the wider organization: the multi-functional team approach. For UNHCR, the multi-functional team brings together different professional backgrounds and experiences—as well as gender diversity—to work together on similar projects or outcomes. Recognising the advantages this multi-functional team working brings to UNHCR, the Innovation Service wanted to experiment with this approach and innovation facilitation.

Key project groups were formed around focus thematics—including Social Media Monitoring, Predictive Analytics, and Communication with Communities (CwC) in emergency contexts. This also saw joint missions to operations, to allow us to bring

a range of perspectives and experiences into conversations with field-colleagues. We moved away from framing our missions as ‘a Learn Lab mission’ or ‘an Emergency Lab mission’, but rather work with an operation to determine which areas (thematics) of support they would need. This facilitation team model is still work-in-progress. Through an experimentation phase, we plan to determine how best to formulate these facilitation teams and how we can leverage wider collective expertise within the organization.

A Lab by any other name ..?

Has this model been successful so far, or are we repeating the ‘mistakes’ of the Innovation Lab? Joseph Guay, an Associate at The Policy Lab, describes how ‘research and experience shows that when innovation does happen, it can be ad hoc, incremental, siloed and forgotten, affected populations and local communities are often excluded from the process’. Does our focus towards diverse teams go anyway to addressing this?

Feedback from colleagues sees them welcoming this project focused, multi-functional approach—it’s a functional way of working that they are familiar with to some extent. From the Innovation Service’s viewpoint, there have been tangible benefits to adopting this ‘non-siloed’ working model, even in early stages. Working with differing opinions and experiences is inherently creative if space is allowed for disagreement and diversity. There have been some real breakthroughs for the Innovation Service this year, due in part to the power of these diverse teams. An example of such would be ‘Project Jetson’, the predictive analytics project bringing together data scientists, strategic designers, coders, data visualisers and former and current Mogadishu residents, to design an artificially intelligent model to predict displacement (arrival figures), in Somalia. This project demonstrates how we can work free of silos, with the early results showing more than incremental change in the area of applied humanitarian predictive analytics.

The Innovation Service is not claiming an innovation breakthrough—but are fully committed to rise to the ‘challenges’ our contemporary innovation critics share.

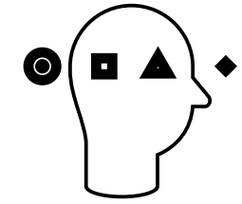
Keeping our Communicating with Communities focus

Throughout this process, have we lost our thematic focus? The Emergency Lab was designed to support innovation in the field of Communicating with Communities (CwC)—is this no longer a priority for UNHCR’s Innovation Service? Quite the contrary, the need to bring affected populations into our multi-functional team approach is a key priority for the years ahead of us. The eternal challenge being, how to move beyond tokenistic representation and to their meaningful participation and leadership in the development of innovative solutions. Communicating with Communities is everybody’s job.

The Emergency Lab is dead, long live communication.

What does Innovation ≠ Technology mean?

By John Warnes, Innovation Officer (Connectivity)



In the humanitarian sector, knowing even a little bit about technology can take you a long way. Comparatively, with many other sectors public and private, we’ve been a little behind the times when it comes to adopting and adapting to new technologies and bringing in people with the right skill sets to effectively harness them. This is no surprise given that many of the contexts we’re working in have been less connected and occasionally dangerous, not to mention politically complex.

As such having a little bit of an insight has managed to allow these tech-humanitarians to take centre stage and build a following across social media. This has also resulted in a plethora of conferences and panel (read:‘Manel’) discussions with panelists playing buzzword bingo with the latest tech jargon.

And this misses the point of Innovation. It becomes an ego trip; a vehicle for oneself rather than a vehicle for the cause, the users or even the technology itself.

This is why UNHCR’s Innovation Service has come out strongly with a message that innovation and technology are not the same.

We like to focus on communities. Those who are receiving humanitarian assistance

and are looking to improve their lives and live with dignity. Any product or service that we are involved with has to serve the needs of the user; we don't want to use technologies for the sake of using them, nor seek out challenges to apply the technology to, putting the cart before the horse.

Are we a bunch of technophobes then? Absolutely not. And this brings me to the point of my post – to unpack a little about how we view technology, how we want to approach it and how it can support innovation in the most effective ways. As having a role – and current job title – that directly relates to technology, the stance we have taken initially made me uncomfortable. But through the work, we recognised our role was to pull the pendulum in the other direction, and that the nuances of our approach are worth debating and discussing with a broader audience.

Firstly, I'll start with the fact that we aren't a technology company, a web development company or product manufacturer. However much we, or some of our peers, think we might be – or are able to be – I believe there are better and more qualified people for whom this is their core business. And on top of that, there is legal status and mandate. Is the United Nations going to start developing apps for everything? Right now, we don't really have a great track record in delivering digital services compared to the private sector, or even the public sector, save for a few pioneering international organizations. I see our role in understanding technology, applying humanitarian principles to it (akin to what is noted in The Signal Code) – and doing our utmost to ensure that it works in favour of our constituents.

Finally, if you start developing products or services yourself, you can quickly fall into the trap of peddling them for all possible opportunities, going against the age-old truth that challenges come before solutions.

Secondly, I'd like to provide a breakdown of how I see the intersect between innovation and technology, and how humanitarians may address each of the areas. I've split it into four different categories that essentially could be one big quadrant graph of Innovative approaches and technology.

That isn't to say any of these approaches are wrong. In fact, they're all really valuable and necessary for us to adapt with the times. What we have had to figure out as UNHCR's Innovation Service is where our efforts are best placed, and where others may be better positioned to apply.

1. Application of Technology.
This is essentially what we're doing each day, every day. Technology can be anything from a pencil through to a laptop and smartphone. And it's not only the basics – I'd also include tools that have been around for awhile and have become more commonplace in humanitarian delivery. Mass SMS systems come to mind, such as our previous Ascend project, as do hotlines, and mobile data collection even has been around long enough for me to consider its use really something that should

be a mainstay of what we're doing. We find it bizarre that some of these are considered by some as 'innovative' when in fact the application is straightforward, and the technology mature. In sum, we see this as tech that is commonly applied in humanitarian use cases.

2. Application of Innovative Technology.
This essentially could be considered part of modernisation efforts. For instance around trying to upgrade our internal systems, using massive touch screens, even things like using VR for our external communications work, but you know my thoughts about that. This is essentially technology that has just been introduced to market, fits a very particular niche, or is still in experimental phases of development. Nonetheless, people have made forays into applying the technology in a humanitarian setting based on its corporate potential for which it has inevitably been developed.

So that's not the kind of stuff that UNHCR's Innovation Service includes in its mandate of responsibilities. These sort of applications, particularly the benefits around modernisation can only be brought to bear if the main divisions and departments of large organizations take this on board. If we look at it in our Innovation cave, then it will never scale and have the impact that it needs. Plus, it's not actually about us being more innovative.

3. Innovative Application of Technology.
To be honest, we have a fond spot for this point. Maybe it's because more of the simple and mature technologies are commonplace, affordable, and accessible in many of the contexts we're working in. And often because it is the most impactful, and the most overlooked. For instance, the Boda Boda Talk Talk project in Uganda. This was an idea born out of an Internews project in South Sudan. The technology was simple yet the approach to using it, and how the communities experimented and evolved how they used it was innovative. They found new ways of approaching the technology and were driven around solutions of communication. In this case, we borrowed an application and by allowing it to constantly evolve it became innovative.

4. Innovative Application of Innovative Technology.
Some people would probably call this the 'money shot' for an Innovation Service, but we don't see this really any differently from any innovative application of other technology, or no technology at all. Nonetheless, it can be exciting to find ways of bringing new innovative technology to bear in ways that are unique to the communities they are meant to serve, or that provide us with the insights that we specifically need. As mentioned earlier, we don't take a technology and look for a challenge, but boy do we try and stay up to date so that when we're working with a field operation looking to make a remote training experience more immersive, we understand what the capabilities of VR are and the role it plays in our 'tool belt' of solutions. Another example might be Project Jetson, which is striving to use as much data as possible to

Finally, if you start developing products or services yourself, you can quickly fall into the trap of peddling them for all possible opportunities, going against the age-old truth that challenges come before solutions.

predict population movements to help us better prepare. The only way to compute this is by using some of the most innovative technologies available today.

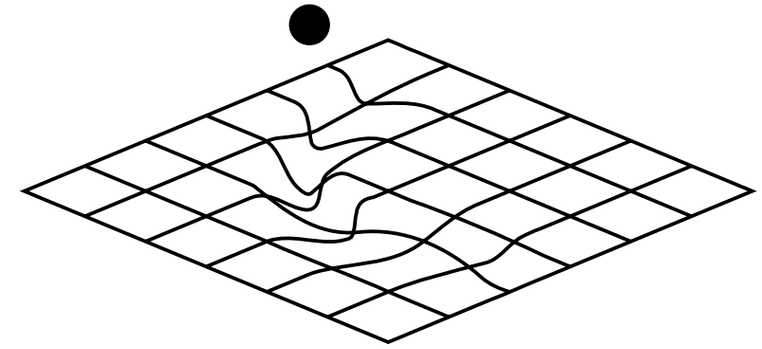
So while Innovation ≠ Technology, technology can be innovative, innovation can use technology to innovate, and it can also be applied in innovative ways, or not. There are some important modernisation efforts underway in all humanitarian organizations. These should not be dismissed as benign; they are vitally important, but not necessarily innovation.

Merely using the most innovative technology available will not always mean its application in humanitarian settings is innovative. It could be misplaced or at worst, frankly, damaging.

While of course we will continue to explore and test nascent technologies, we won't shout loud about it without having identified suitable and tangible use cases that will positively affect the lives of the communities we're serving. Similarly while it is a huge amount of work, we won't personally be shouting about modernisation efforts that are simply making our internal systems more efficient, rather than using innovative approaches to tackle some of our more complex challenges.

The final frontier for inclusive connectivity

By Giulia Balestra, Associate Connectivity Officer



"What happens when refugees tell us—directly and repeatedly—that finding meaning in life is equally or more important than finding food that day? That creating a future for their child prompts them to start a perilous journey and give up the certainty of shelter and food? Refugees come to us and respond to us not as a sequence of needs, but as a whole person."

Lesvos, Greece—2015.

A summer that was different, a summer that made other summers be different. We stand on the shore as if we are standing on the door, waiting, looking at the seemingly calm waters and flat horizon. We have food, water, extra clothes, and blankets, first-aid supplies. We think we are ready, ready for what we think are people's first, immediate, basic needs.

"Where can I charge my phone?"

"Is there WiFi?"

We answer with silence, feeling trapped in the survival thinking of an emergency response. We forgot that together, with what keeps us alive, there are things that make us alive. Meaning, purpose, connection.

But what if connectivity was a basic human right? As basic as food. As basic as protection. As basic as education. What if refugees and host communities alike had equal access to the opportunities that come with being online, being connected? What if

paying for a phone, for data and calls didn't mean not being able to pay for school fees, health care or food?
What if this idea did not make some of us frown, question, doubt, wonder why refugees need WiFi and why they have phones in the first place?

What about you, and us? Why do you have a phone and why do you need WiFi?

Personally, I use my phone and the internet for work, to stay in touch with my family and my friends, and sometimes to distract myself. These are all good reasons, whether I am a refugee or not. Now, imagine you could use your phone to access information in times of crises, to find out how to be safe or access medical care, to translate what you want to say when there is no other way to communicate, to find a job, to find your family. In this sense, the small piece of connected technology that you hold in your hand becomes even more crucial and more valuable to your life.

The digital revolution will be inclusive. Or it won't be. That is our choice.

It is time we look at these digital needs and realise that, yes, there are indeed differences in how and why people connect. Yet there is one thing that we all share (or should share): the right to connectivity. I see a world, not too far from now, not too far from today, where we can rethink our approach and change the way we respond to emergencies, shifting the attention from "needs" to "rights", from "basic" to "human". One where connectivity is a tool to create a more just and inclusive future.

The digital world has its own barriers: there's poor infrastructure and coverage, high costs of devices and data, strict legal regulations and many more challenges. At best these factors are delaying the inclusive future we hope for, at worst they are making it impossible for displaced communities to be, and stay connected.

We can all start today with one simple action, so simple we think that it would not make any difference: be better at listening. Let us listen to what people ask and say they need, rather than what we think is best for them. I believe that this can change the way we work as humanitarians and the way we are as humans.

Inclusive (dis)connections

We live in a hyper-connected and fast-paced reality, where some days my life is 99% digital and 1%...real. Would I know this if I were not connected already and able to navigate, search and discover anything I wished? Probably not. Today, a third of this same world is not connected to the internet. You could say that maybe it's for the better: I also fantasize about not having an e-mail address, a couch where people can surf on, a liked (or not so much liked) photo or post. After all, aren't we, the other two thirds, controlled by technology, constantly worried about our privacy and data, competing against robots and artificial intelligence for jobs and resources? These worries are luxury too, because we have a choice to connect or disconnect, to choose or not to choose if, how, and when to access the internet.

So whether it is about connecting or disconnecting, what matters is choice and making sure that everyone has the same chance to (dis)connection. Inclusion happens when we strive towards having the same rights and opportunities, and accept that, as long as there are barriers and obstacles in someone else's way, we also are not free.

The promise

Are we creating a better world by providing connectivity? Maybe. Or maybe not. But this is happening either way and while we strive to make the most, we need to ensure that the same rights are provided to all.

I do believe that if there is something that connectivity can help us do, in this virtual space of ours, is to create what we want to see. A better world. A different world. A more connected world. What if we had a tool for change, right here, in our hands? And what could this change look like?

We will only know when you, and I and a person with refugee status, all have access to the same opportunities, when we can all afford for a mobile phone, register a SIM card with whatever proof of identity we dispose of, pay for data, and have the necessary skills to navigate this web and know how to make safe and informed decisions. In other words, until all refugees and hosting populations, regardless of age, gender or demographic group, can access mobile and internet connectivity to build brighter futures for themselves, their families and the world.

How do we make this a reality?

The vision of Connectivity for Refugees, an initiative currently led by UNHCR's Innovation Service, is to bridge the digital divide, connect those who are currently not connected and include everyone in the digital revolution that is taking place globally, regardless of age, gender, and diversity. Our role in this is one of connectors too: we want to bring actors in the network closer together, spur conversation and change, and function as a catalyst in realising the vision of Connectivity for Refugees.

Our work consists in developing a practical roadmap towards this goal and to make sure that we get there. The way we see connectivity is as deeply interlinked to freedom and choice: freedom to have access to opportunities and information, freedom to make better choices and actions. Framed as such, connectivity is both a right and the instrument to exert this same right, a "right to freedom of opinion

and expression; [...] to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (Article 19. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

We have come a long way since the inception of the Connectivity for Refugee initiative, learned a number of important lessons which have reshaped and informed our strategy moving forward. There are still many barriers on the path to connectivity, from technical to social and political: poor infrastructure, legal regulations to register SIM cards, costs of devices and services, lack of relevant content and digital literacy. Immediate action needs to be taken for refugees to have the ability to legally connect to the internet. However, we firmly believe that what is on the other side of the fence—the possibility to create better and more inclusive communities—is worth the attempt to climb it. We will not achieve this if we work in silos: connectivity calls for stronger collaborations and holistic approaches. Everyone has a different role to play in reaching this same goal, from governments to the international community, to displaced populations and the private sector.

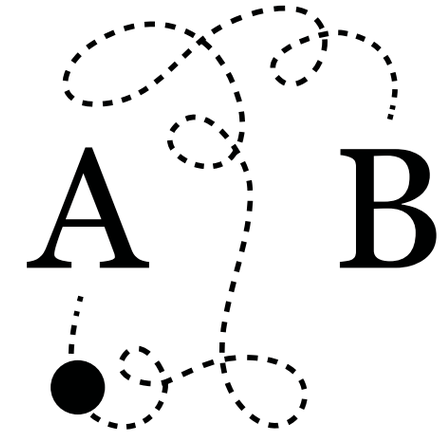
The final frontier

The digital world has its own barriers: there's poor infrastructure and coverage, high costs of devices and data, strict legal regulations and many more challenges. At best these factors are delaying the inclusive future we hope for, at worst they are making it impossible for displaced communities to be, and stay connected.

On one horizon I see physical borders, higher walls and digital barriers making us all more far apart, and highlighting the cracks between us. On the other one, I see the cyber as a place where a shared, inclusive future is a possibility.

I rely on the power of the internet to break down some of these barriers and find ways around (fire) walls. I rely on you to join us in rethinking what we mean by basic needs and who has the right and is entitled to a fulfilling future.

Do we not all want to create connections, find community and belonging? And what if the final frontier is the one of connectivity as a human right?



How UNHCR Zimbabwe mainstreamed innovation into everything they're doing

By Lauren Parater, Innovation Community and Content Manager

Treating the symptom – not the root cause

Change is hard. This was one of the first lessons that Rumbidzai Mapolisa, Senior Resettlement Assistant based in UNHCR's Harare, Zimbabwe office, learned during her UNHCR Innovation Fellowship journey. Once selected for the Fellowship, Mapolisa knew immediately she wanted to focus on issues linked with aid dependency and disempowerment in Tongogara refugee campin Zimbabwe.

Mapolisa was confident she already had the appropriate solution that would be at the center of her Fellowship. She had an idea to create a one-stop platform (web based marketplace/ecosystem) to showcase refugee talent, skills, and stories. The digital platform she envisioned would transcend the restrictions on employment and movement as refugees would trade online right from the camp. The platform would keep the refugees current and connect them to global village.

"I observed that refugees in Tongogara camp were forced to rely on aid and this had a debilitating effect on their productivity thereby creating a dependency syndrome. For most of them going on resettlement to the USA became the only viable option. They were living in a state of limbo awaiting the "American dream" and for many life would resume once they reach the shores of America. The web based platform was meant to connect them to the

rest of the world as well as let the world know about them..I believed my idea was so brilliant and that obviously once we deployed this platform, it would revolutionize the refugees' lives. But after going to the Innovation Fellowship workshop, one of the first things they taught us was not to be married to our ideas and to test assumptions. Following the innovation process made me re-think my approach," she says.

The Innovation Fellowship encouraged her to start engaging the community, to ask them what they wanted, and empower refugees to be innovators themselves. It wasn't long before Mapolisa was championing this bottom-up approach and advocating for a refugee-centered design in her operation.

"I was treating the symptom instead of the root cause of the problem. We have to recondition our minds when thinking about humanitarian aid and the challenges refugees face. Changing this mindset is extremely difficult."

Inspired by her initial lessons learned, Mapolisa recognized the opportunity and need to bring this approach to her colleagues in the field. Change wasn't an easy path but it was one she was steadfast in expanding outside of her Fellowship experience.

An operation ripe for innovation

This new approach soon expanded beyond just Mapolisa's Innovation Fellowship. Her curiosity and unwavering commitment to refugee-led innovation had soon spread across UNHCR's Zimbabwe operation. Two colleagues, Kennedy Chimsoro, an Assistant Programme Officer, and Esther Kirimi, a Protection Officer, played an integral part in catalyzing innovation at the operational level alongside Mapolisa.

The Fellowship fed into what the Zimbabwe operation is doing now – a catalyst to expand what was already happening on the ground. The operation started strategically incorporating the innovation methodology at a small scale and gradually implemented these new ways of working into their day to day jobs. "Through Rumbi's guidance and assistance in trying to escalate the innovation approach...we have now mainstreamed this in our country operations plan," explains Chimsoro.

In 2017, UNHCR Zimbabwe attempted to embed this refugee-centered design and innovation process in their programming cycle – a first for the organization.

Strategically bringing the innovation process into the operation

The Zimbabwe operation is now using this innovation approach for multi-year planning and to address the simple fact that funding is lower due to the growing demands of humanitarian resources. "Innovation is becoming even more necessary in terms of identifying workable, practical solutions that can assist in programme implementation whether it's at the planning stage, the needs assessment, or during monitoring. With regards to the Strategic Directions of the High Commissioner, the innovation approach is quite critical," says Kirimi.

UNHCR Zimbabwe is not just looking at the one-year planning cycle to understand how to embed innovation within their operation; the staff in the operation are looking much farther beyond that. They wanted to ensure that innovation touched all levels of their country operation. This multifunctional approach to innovation now involved the entire Zimbabwe office, even outside of their innovation focal points that have been identified. "If you talk to people in admin, in programme, in protection, they all know about innovation. We are hoping that we can keep utilizing it in the different steps of our programme cycle."

Including innovation in their country operations plan was not the only step to create this shift. They are also bringing the innovation model into how they view partners. The operation hopes this new approach can help diversify their partnership base, and therefore feed into their mobilization framework. Internally and externally, they included innovation within all their stakeholder engagement meetings to confirm that innovation was included within their objectives to feed into the result based framework.

"We try to simplify innovation so it's not just this big concept that we have to implement, but we break it down into small components that feed into the results-based framework and then into the activities, outputs, and overall objectives." says Chimsoro. "If you are looking at this programme cycle, one of the key things we have started to do is incorporate innovation into our resource mobilization."

Another area the team has utilized this approach is through rethinking needs assessments with the refugee community. Refugees are being engaged outside of the traditional focus group discussions, usually reserved for insights into how to build their programming. They are exploring new ways to include refugees directly in monitoring and programme implementation, and giving them a role over and above what UNHCR normally does in terms of financial verification and issues of performance. This focus of empowerment, two-way feedback, and self-reliance is at the core of UNHCR Zimbabwe's innovation methodology: always start with the community member themselves.

"I believe the more refugees become self-reliant, they are able to innovate, the better the protection environment will become. The more you truly engage refugees and more importantly, listen to them, I believe, we will undoubtedly have better protection in the camps," says Kirimi.

The team argues that the benefits of this engagement approach are two-fold. Through prototyping solutions led by refugees themselves, UNHCR will, in turn, save costs by not providing solutions that refugees themselves aren't interested in. "In the end, using this innovative approach is good for the refugees, it is also good for the organization, and in terms of how we are effective in carrying out our daily

activities whether it's in programming or admin," explains Mapolisa.

Despite the end of her Fellowship year, Mapolisa is still focusing on the issue of dependency in the camps but looking at it with an innovation lens. And now with her entire operation on board to tackle the challenges.

"UNHCR in Zimbabwe is very committed to promoting innovation in our operation. The team is exploring innovative solutions for service delivery and employing the innovation process to engage persons of concern towards self-reliance. It is our pride and joy and we hope to see more innovative solutions from our persons of concern. I credit our Innovation Fellow, Rumbidzai Mapolisa for her concerted efforts in starting this process for us, and facilitating innovation in our operation," adds Mr. Robert Tibagwa, UNHCR's Representative in Zimbabwe.

Moving from dependence to dignity

It's hard to ignore the cultural shift in how UNHCR Zimbabwe is working with refugees on the ground. They are trying to move away from what Chimsoro describes as the "dependence syndrome." A key aspect of this shift is activating the "creative confidence" of refugees and creating the space for them to identify their challenges, their own solutions, and be empowered enough to implement these solutions.

"I think the innovative approach we're going towards achieving is a real change of mindset with refugees and other people of concern to ensure they become more proactive and not only depend on UNHCR for assistance," explain Chimsoro.

Despite the strict structures of UNHCR's programming cycles – that can often leave little room to innovate – UNHCR Zimbabwe was committed to finding a way that the process could be mainstreamed at the operational level. "We would want to inspire innovation by refugees and for refugees. What we are doing at this level now is including this within our programming cycles, and creating a structure for this type of activity to continue strategically," says Mapolisa.

Many of these changes came down to one word for the team: dignity. The refugee-centered approach, they believe, will not only have higher success for UNHCR but much better impact for refugees in the end. "We're actually listening to the refugees. So inherently our desire is more empathetic, it is more relevant, it's more useful to them, it's more life transforming."

Mapolisa, Kirimi, and Chimsoro are optimistic that one day this approach could become the norm for not only UNHCR but for all organizations working in humanitarian aid.

Change is not without pain points

As other operations look to replicate the good practices surrounding innovation in Zimbabwe, the team believes there are some crucial lessons learned. One of the first major challenges was buy-in with the operation. This lack of buy-in was partially because innovation itself was a bit of a mysterious term – did it mean technology or bringing in new apps for refugees? There was a lot of confusion surrounding the elusive idea of "innovation" that they had to address.

"People sometimes don't quite understand what innovation is," explains Mapolisa. "How is it different from how we're doing things anyway?"

"People sometimes don't quite understand what innovation is," explains Mapolisa. "How is it different from how we're doing things anyway? How is it going to benefit persons of concern? If people haven't seen what it is, it's a bit difficult to relate to it. And some were concerned that in many ways we would be reinventing the wheel."

Mapolisa highlights that the big takeaway from this process is that one must keep trying to innovate, even if you think you may fail. This can often require you to "innovate around how to innovate" within your local context. "You have to be flexible and keep re-thinking strategies to achieve your desired outcome. You have to find a way to win, to keep working at it, and explore how you can tie creativity to existing solutions."

The need for buy-in and acceptance of the process was required at all levels – including the refugee themselves. The UNHCR Zimbabwe operation ensured that refugees understood not only what the concept meant but how it could be used to empower the communities where they live.

"I think sometimes the word innovation just sounds so big and complex that it scares a lot of people away," explains Kirimi. But when UNHCR staff explained the opportunities for innovation with the refugee communities, they become extremely excited at the prospects. "Once they understood that we're trying to tap into their ideas, their talents, their skills, they were very interested in the approach. Some of them even started telling us about the innovative things that they were doing before they became refugees," she says.

Through giving refugees this space to experiment with innovation and more importantly, feel like their ideas were being listened to, the team began witnessing a mindset shift in the camp.

"After coming into the camp and relying on UNHCR for so long, they almost forgot how to be innovative. But once we bring the discussion to the table, we see the excitement…people start telling us 'oh we can do this, we could do this, we used to this, I have a skill for this,'" says Kirimi. She highlights that it's important to explain how innovation benefits communities not only in the short term but also emphasizing the longer-term effects of such programming. But the question to follow is always: "I may have an idea. But what's next?"

Unfortunately, like almost all other UNHCR

operations, UNHCR Zimbabwe is facing more funding cuts as needs grow across the world. The team acknowledged the importance of managing expectations, as they do not have the capacity to take every new idea forward. But they are hoping innovation can provide an answer to this challenge as well.

One way the office is addressing this problem is adapting their partnership approach at the local level for UNHCR. This includes reaching out to private sponsors and non-traditional partners to come and work with the teams in the camp. “What we are trying to do is identify some of the skills and ideas that young people have, and link these young people to private companies, innovators, or institutions that would be interested in their ideas as opposed to UNHCR taking on that responsibility,” Kirimi explains. “So now we are walking hand in glove with the different partners to make this happen,” adds Chimsoro.

For other UNHCR staff and operations interested in recreating this model, Chimsoro says that it’s also important to recognize that innovation is a continuous process. “We are still in the present. I think that’s the good part about innovation. It’s not a magic pill that you take and simply have all the right solutions. The dynamics will change each time.”

The operation is now taking these principles of innovation and continuously applying them to new and old challenges so that it becomes more of a mindset for staff. “The moment people start to change the way they do things, then they start to adapt to new approaches, ” says Chimsoro. This recognition of innovation as a theory of change, instead of just a set of activities, will ultimately be the main driver for behavior change for staff in the field. UNHCR’s Zimbabwe operation is convinced that this mindset shift will also be the catalyst for larger changes in how we view humanitarian aid and refugee themselves.

The traditional approach is no longer enough

The key to scaling this innovative mindset to other operations will start with questioning the status-quo of how aid is delivered. There are more needs, more people, and less funding available.

“The multi-year, multi-partner approach is something that you simply cannot do without incorporating innovation. Even just looking a the traditional way of approaching donors is now different. They are requesting different types of modalities which include innovative methods that are sustainable. It is obvious that the traditional approach is no longer enough,” argues Chimsoro.

In today’s world, people are displaced for an average of eighteen years – a number expected to rise over the next decade should displacement trends continue. “We see refugees being born in refugee camps, having children in refugee camps, and dying in camps,” says Kirimi. She argues that the three durable solutions for refugees, voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement are no longer enough.

“We know those three solutions are not the only solutions that we should look at. Now more and more we’re talking about finding solutions, permanent solutions, away from the traditional three solutions that we’ve always, as UNHCR, talked about. Now we’re challenged because we have more people becoming refugees and fewer people finding solutions. Few are getting out of this cycle.”

UNHCR Zimbabwe recognized that focusing on empowering refugees to become self-reliant may be another solution to explore. Through this process, UNHCR can then reduce assistance as refugees become self-sustaining and to move simply to targeted assistance of the most vulnerable.

“In most operations, we are satisfied as humanitarian workers knowing that you know we’ll give food, water, clothing, health and that’s it. But can we rethink solutions? Innovation gives us an opportunity to change our perspective as the UN, as aid workers and humanitarian workers, to actually begin to see refugees on an equal footing as real agents of change. They can actually take their destiny into their own hands and stand on their own two feet and come up with ideas and ways of solving their problems even better than we can” says Kirimi.

Creating this change across other the entire organization will take time, but if UNHCR Zimbabwe can measure the impact of this approach – it may be the spark to catalyze a new wave of transformation within UNHCR.

“For me I think that embracing innovation within UNHCR, especially adopting this bottom-up approach where we allow refugees to be innovators, I think it’s going to have a great impact in how we deliver. It will have a great impact on how effective we are in actually delivering our services to persons of concern,” argues Chimsoro.

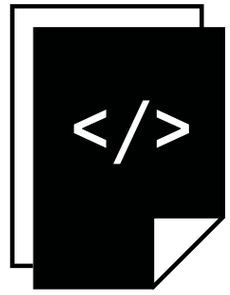
UNHCR Zimbabwe and the team behind the operation are leaders in this area, with a willingness to not only try new ideas but to rethink how we are operating in the field and the humanitarian system. They believe that we cannot leave innovation out of emergencies and that we must shift the very core of how we interact with refugees as our beneficiaries.

But Mapolisa, Kirimi, and Chimsoro are quick to highlight that it won’t be humanitarians who will be the leaders solving the great problems of tomorrow. Mapolisa is eager to expand on this idea, “I’m hoping that in Zimbabwe, the refugee innovators will come up with groundbreaking solutions that will change whole of the humanitarian sector. The potential is there, we just need to give them the opportunity,”

“They are the real innovators,” she says.

FUTURE

Revolutionising Recruitment: A test for AI in the United Nations



For UNHCR's Division of Human Resources (DHR), an idea to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist with recruitment could end up revolutionising the recruitment screening processing, taking mere seconds to accomplish what currently takes staff members days or weeks. The machine assistance is part of a multi-step process to screen applicants in the agency's talent pools. Humans still, however, validate the machine process or outcome and handle the nuances of recruitment. For now.

With staff across the agency rotating every few years and external talent pools of thousands of hopeful hires across 29 categories, recruiters spend meaningful time on each posting sifting through interested applicants, qualified or still in the vetting process. At the start of 2018, recruiters at UNHCR's Affiliate Partnerships and Recruitment Section (APRS) were using various manually-intensive methods to screen candidates, methods both familiar and frustratingly slow.

An expedient way to comb through the masses proved elusive. Screening questions were too easy, it seemed—applicants could figure out the expected answers and pass through to the next round, and that would not help. With the current Human Resources software, Peoplesoft v9.2, a solution wasn't coming fast enough, nor did it seem fit-for-purpose since maintaining a database of questions was also going to be time-consuming. At the same time, conversations were erupting around buying a separate system for applicant tracking or outsourcing to a 3rd party, but the associated costs and effort were a clear impetus to find another way. For Senior Business Analyst Netta Rankin, the issue at the heart of it was that her colleagues seemed to be massively labouring through their screening tasks.

"At the heart of it, I just like to help people and I don't like to see them suffering through their jobs if I can work with them to help find solutions," Rankin says. So, she set about doing something about it with her colleagues. This is her second time being involved in bringing new technology to DHR.

Ten years earlier, when Rankin arrived as a consultant and then new IT Officer at UNHCR, she saw how recruiters manually sifted through candidates' applications. She was part of the team that brought the then-new PeopleSoft v8.9 system to UNHCR in 2005/6, and so she worked with the Recruitment colleagues to change things up and establish a new database format, based on which the Peoplesoft solution could be implemented as the main Human Resources (HR) tool.

Introducing the new PeopleSoft HR system and its various modules was not an easy sell at first. HR staff were used to their mainframe system. Some were convinced they did their job in a unique way that the software would not capture. They couldn't see how the new system would help. Rankin recalls being met with a lot of crossed arms.

"Some people were pretty upset actually," Rankin remembers. "We had resistance, and there was. Staff who were quite comfortable on the legacy system were unhappy about having to be trained on something new. In the beginning, they only saw the things that their system did really well, and failed to see all the things it didn't do that the new system provided."

Eventually, when it came time to work on the Recruitment module, by 2009, recruiters were ready to try the new software. Rankin, with her background in consulting, has helped companies use technology to solve problems since the late 1980s. She's learned about getting people in conservative environments to accept tools they don't fully understand.

"Mostly you have to demonstrate what the benefit is for them, the users," she explains, saying pitching something new from the perspective of management or the organization will leave staff uninspired. "You need to engage people doing day to day work and get them excited about it, and understand the benefits. You can't expect them to just happily get on board. It's about trying to find things that will make them feel good about receiving this change."

So a decade later, as the once-new software she'd led to install has become both entrenched and cumbersome in some ways, Rankin was excited to champion something new. She did not expect it to be something new to all of UNHCR. But a chance conversation with one of her colleague, Julia Schtivelman-Watt, DHR's Head of Assignments and

Talent Mobilization Service, led her to speak with Hans Park, a Strategic Design and Research Manager with UNHCR's Innovation Service, about the possibility of using Artificial Intelligence for recruitment.

A little disruption

"I thought innovation was just about coming up with new ideas, for example, tents or sanitation for our people of concern," Rankin says. And to her, AI meant something to do with robots. But as the conversation with Park progressed, she started thinking about all the ways AI and machine learning could work for her division. And nothing she brought up seemed beyond Park's imagination. "I was pretty excited about the fact that nothing I was saying was fazing him," Rankin says. "Everything seemed possible."

Focusing on the Affiliate Partnerships and Recruitment Section's screening tasks seemed like the right first place to see how AI could change things, according to Park. "We identified a challenge we could work on together that wasn't too difficult and wouldn't disrupt the existing system too much," he says.

They thought about the thousands of people on applicant lists and how they were currently being screened, with nine humans manually evaluating based on careful reading of the full application. Does Applicant A have the minimum requirements? She's still in the running. Does she have relevant experience? No. She's out.

"This processing seems rather linear, whereas with machines we have the luxury to work with a non-linear process of selection, meaning we can go back and forth checking data instantaneously as necessary, compared to how a human can work," says Park. It also takes hours, days or even weeks for a human to process thousands of applications. A machine can do full processing in two or three seconds.

So together with two other members of UNHCR's Innovation Service, Sofia Kyriazi and Rebecca Moreno Jimenez, the team built a system that takes in all the information from applicants' work experience and letters of interest, searching for terms and analyzing language to pre-screen candidates who may fit a Talent Pool profile. Instead of spending days going through applications on a search for keywords, recruiters can spend more time in the other parts of the applicant vetting process.

With high turnover in the recruitment area of Human Resources, knowledge about how to evaluate candidates' experience and attributes repeatedly walked out the door and had to be built up again. The machine would be able to keep it, and build on it.

Conversations around the technology centred on more than just code. Park, Rankin and the recruiting team had to grapple with questions about bias, self-awareness, and ethics.

"How do we create trust in a machine?" Park says the team members questioned.

"How do the recruiters trust that the machine is doing its job correctly? Are we looking into fairness? When humans shortlist candidates, how biased is it? And when a machine does it, can we eliminate those biases, or are we creating new areas where we are not fair?"

Rankin says the system is expected to offer consistency across recruiters, reduce potential mistakes with respect to screening candidates in vs out, and especially speed up that process. Before implementation, the system will be carefully tested, and the results will be validated on an ongoing basis even after it is live. The system works much like a human brain, a recruiters' brain that is, and so the team named it Nero to give it some form of humanness.

The cycle of scepticism

But Nero wasn't the object of immediate affection from some colleagues. Once again, Rankin found herself faced with scepticism from those uncomfortable with the idea of a machine making screening decisions.

For those recruiters who believed their jobs were too nuanced and experience-based to be entrusted to a machine, Rankin described how Nero gets "trained" just like a new recruiter would be, with plenty of input, and rules or guidelines on how to make decisions just as a human would.

"When a new recruiter joins DHR you have to explain what to look for," she says. "It's the same for a machine." She says the hard part was actually writing down what everyone is thinking as they go through that selection process. But there is a process. And therefore, it's a process that Nero can learn or imitate.

"I think now they understand that these machines aren't separate entities, they're trying to mimic what we do and just do it faster," Park says. "It's a challenge of communication, because it doesn't help that the machine just works," Park says. "People want to know how and why."

The team recognizes that human biases could be programmed into the machine. If the implementation of Nero is done by a white North American male, for instance, keyword results could reflect his implicit bias or even spelling proclivities that would favour American turns of phrase and vocabulary.

"It's been interesting to be in these rooms and be discussing how philosophical questions become reality when they need to be hard wired into a system that impacts people," says Park. "We don't take it lightly. There's a lot of scepticism and we welcome it, and are constantly trying to improve the code and the application of it."

But the team working on Nero is focused on teaching the machine to operate with as little bias as possible. And Park thinks they've succeeded, for now.

Besides improving UNHCR's efficiency and speed in looking for the right talent of people to send on posts around the globe, Park says Nero will make recruitment more

fair and inclusive. “That gets into the broader (hiring) goals of inclusion, diversity and gender equity,” he says. That is the goal.

A new excitement

Future analysis will be helpful in identifying whether the machine is thinking more like a man, a woman, an African, a young person, et cetera. The team will also continue discussions about what to do if and when Nero makes a mistake- a conversation technology companies who are working on everything from driverless cars to facial recognition software, are also contending with.

“If someone loses trust in the system because it makes a mistake…will it be okay, because humans also make mistakes?” asks Park. “Or will expectations of machines be higher?”

Humans still verify Nero’s results. At least, they do currently. “We call it pre-screening in fact because humans still manage the nuances,” Rankin says. “They are not ready yet to fully trust their Nero. Maybe one day we’ll drop the human verification part, when we see it’s trained so well it’s never making a mistake. But we’ll never leave it to evolve on its own.”

For now, they’re excited to see how Nero does as it comes online for a pilot. Because the more recruiters use Nero, the smarter the machine gets. And as recruiters begin to rely on Nero to filter thousands of applicants, they’ll be able to focus on the more human-centric aspects of their jobs.

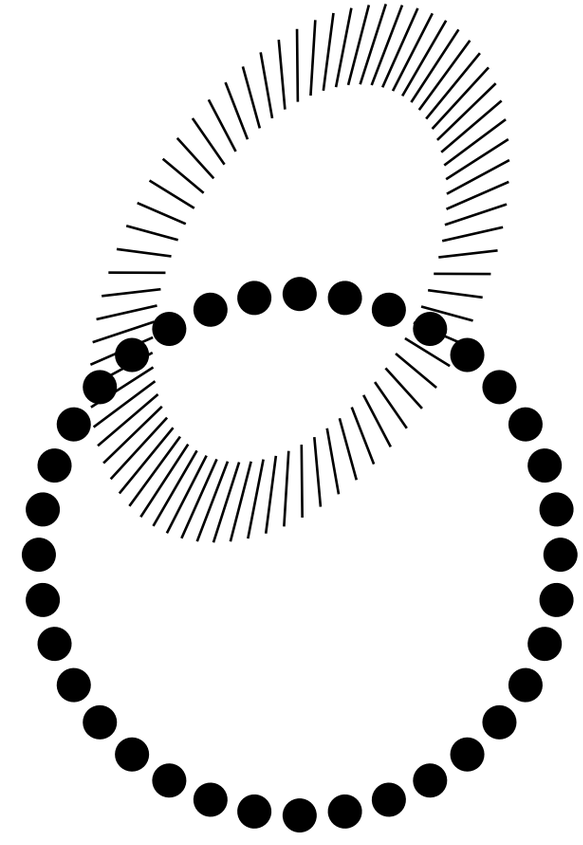
Rankin hopes this boosts job satisfaction for the humans who work in DHR. As her work incorporating AI and machine learning expands, she’s one example of a UNHCR employee with a renewed passion for her work, and a new awareness of what is possible.

“I feel a new excitement in my job,” Rankins says. “I feel like I woke up to something that I wasn’t aware of…I feel quite energized at this stage of my life that there’s this whole other world that could revolutionize the way we work.”

She also noticed that this time around, change came a bit more easily. It’s a sign of culture change within the agency, that more people are willing to be uncomfortable in their jobs and courageous, as they try new things and test out ways to improve service. This time around with this AI initiative she wasn’t pulling the team along but rather, working very collaboratively with the APRS team of recruiters, and the enthusiastic support of the Innovation Service.

“These days, people are questioning the way we do things, and looking for, and wanting technical solutions,” Rankin says. “In many implementations, I’ve done I often had the role of going out and convincing people to change. And now I feel that people are coming for change, and the machines are waiting for them with open arms.”

Is it possible to predict forced displacement?



When rain stops falling on some of the conflict-ridden regions of the Horn of Africa and the drought-stricken land becomes too barren to bear, people move.

They walk for days in search of water, in search of food, in search of new places to settle. But in a country like Somalia, where ethnic differences divide the territory and rival groups fight to control it, moving tends to increase violent conflict.

Escalated violence further exacerbates forced displacement, producing a cyclical phenomenon that leaves on-the-ground teams grappling with challenges that had been unforeseeable until now.

For the past year, UNHCR’s Innovation Service has been working to understand the intrinsic relationship between climate change, violent conflict, and forced displacement. Using supervised machine learning, they designed Jetson, an engine that is fed data and uses trained models to predict the displacement of persons in Somalia.

Jetson gives UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations the potential to become more proactive in their response efforts—a transformation that could significantly improve on-the-ground relief services and more importantly the lives of those who are forcibly displaced.

A fruitful request

Somalia has too often found itself at the volatile intersection of climate change, violent conflict and displacement.

Such was the case in 2011 when the country experienced, what researchers called, the worst famine in 25 years. In just six

months, relentless violence compounded by severe drought forced more than 140,000 Somalis to cross the borders into neighboring Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti.

Dry trees and animal carcasses dotted the landscape along their route, but they kept their eyes on the horizon, waiting for the moment UNHCR tents would speckle their view. Many Somalis did not reach the camps on the other side of the border; their lives claimed by severe malnutrition and dehydration. Those who did often arrived in fragile health conditions.

During the peak of the crisis, the region of Dollo Ado in southeastern Ethiopia received some of the highest numbers of refugees with about 2,000 arrivals per day.

“Picture a concert of people arriving every day,” said Rebeca Moreno Jimenez, Data Scientist at UNHCR’s Innovation Service. “That is overwhelming for our teams on the ground.”

The Dollo Ado team was not fully equipped to assist such a large and unexpected influx of people. Their need for nutritional screening and protection support quickly depleted the resources they had been allocated for the year.

The unprecedented nature of these events left its mark on the team. They remember the bottlenecks in the registration system, the overcrowded camps, and the malnourished babies whose bones could be broken by a slight touch.

These memories have since turned into lessons for humanitarian preparedness.

In 2017, failed rains left Somalis teetering on the brink of famine. The land had once again become dry and unforgiving, but this time it yielded a fruitful request.

Fearful that displacement numbers would be as high as they were in 2011 and knowing that preparation would be essential to their response efforts, the team sent a request to the Innovation Service. They ventured to ask if it was possible to predict the number of arrivals to the region.

“That was a challenge question for me,” Moreno Jimenez said, “but it was the question that launched Project Jetson.”

Powered by open data

UNHCR began experimenting with predictive analytics in 2015 with the establishment of the Winter Cell—an interdisciplinary team tasked with addressing the challenges associated with the scale of population flows from Turkey through to Europe during an uncharacteristically cold winter.

To fulfill its mission, the team sought out value-based partnerships, including the World Meteorological Organization, the Met Office in the UK, academia, and other UN institutions. The collaborative partnership model granted them access to data, resources, and expertise that was not available in-house.

With the collaboration of these organizations in full swing and with the support of UN Global Pulse, a flagship innovation initiative of the UN’s Secretary-General on big data, the team was able to build a model that used meteorological data to predict population flow into Greece.

The humanitarian sector traditionally deals with the consequences of displacement, not with its specific origins. The Winter Cell’s work marked a shift in this dynamic by revealing the potential impact that proactive, data-driven decision-making could have on forcibly displaced individuals.

Although the Winter Cell was dismantled in June of 2016, the insights and partnerships gained during its short existence prepared the UNHCR’s Innovation team to respond to Dollo Ado’s request. Not only does Project Jetson build on the Winter Cell’s predictive model, but it also uses open data sharing and innovative approaches to achieve its objectives.

Forced displacement is a complex phenomenon. Mathematical evidence shows that there are certain factors, such as food insecurity and violent conflict, as well as the appeal of the destination region, in terms of prices, distance, and stability, that cause people to move. Certain combinations of these factors are more likely to make people move than others.

“If we can measure some the factors that make them flee, then we can predict their movements,” Moreno Jimenez said.

Jetson is thus an experiment to discover, understand, and measure the specific factors that cause or indicate the forced displacement of Somalis.

To find those critical variables, the team flew to Ethiopia and conducted interviews with UNHCR’ staff in Dollo Ado and refugees themselves. After months of desk and field research, ten variables including basic commodities market prices, rainfall, incidents of violent conflict, and historical population movement were identified as indicators of Somali displacement.

The Innovation Service team developed strategic partnerships with fourteen organizations to source seven year’s worth of data for the experiment. After processing the anonymized data using machine learning, they built an algorithm that recognizes the combination of factors that exacerbate displacement and makes predictions about population flow.

“Jetson has shown us that we can be doing so much more with data, especially when it’s openly shared,” she said.
The project is a testament to what the humanitarian sector can accomplish when it works together.

On the ground

Currently, Jetson can predict the displacement of persons in Somalia a month in advance, a breakthrough that can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of UNHCR’s services.

With one month's notice, the Somalia team, including the protection cluster, and other relevant operational partners, could adjust resource allocation, better coordinate emergency preparedness and solicit support from other UN agencies or NGOs in neighboring regions. The insights gained from the project are also conducive to more informed scenario planning.

"It's sometimes unbelievable to think that someone is actually using this theoretical craziness on the ground," Moreno Jimenez said.

In recent months, she has been working with Martin Stobbs, Information Management Officer, and Andrea Bruhn, Durable Solutions Officer for Somalia, to crosscheck Jetson's predictions with the actual number of arrivals on the ground. This data is verified by John Waweru, a Data Management Associate based in Nairobi, who sends the actual numbers of arrivals every month. The registration team in Dollo Ado, which is composed of seven people, also cross-checks the arrivals of refugees into the region.

As of June 2018, predictions were accurate for eleven of the country's eighteen regions.

Looking to the future

The Innovation Service team hopes that Jetson will become a standard decision-making tool at UNHCR.
However, all refugee crises are different. The factors that indicate the forced displacement of Somalis will not necessarily indicate that of the Rohingya. In order to scale Project Jetson to other countries, a very detailed level of research is required to identify the displacement indicators specific to that region.

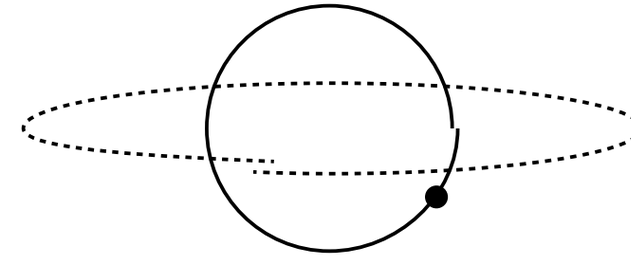
In the meantime, the Innovation Service team hopes to publish the project's algorithms byproducts for public use and will encourage others to improve and adapt the technology to fit their needs. Jetson is a bright spot that the team hopes others in the humanitarian sector will look to that demonstrates the power of data sharing.

For projects like Jetson to continue to evolve, humanitarian organizations will have to create more safe spaces for experimentation and improve how the sector collects, uses, and shares data. If the team behind Jetson can begin to change these behaviors and mindsets, the proactive, data-driven humanitarian system they imagine, can be realized.

"Trying to predict the future is not impossible," Moreno Jimenez said. "It can be done, and this is a new way of doing it."

For the sake of the future, innovate courageously.

By Chris Earney, Head, ad interim, UNHCR Innovation Service



The 1951 Refugee Convention was a moonshot, and perhaps one of the greatest innovations that plays a role in my professional career. Nations agreed that forced displacement was not only something that must be a responsibility shared between nations, but also inherently a shared responsibility to solve. It was novel, had utility, and was successful, it provided a space for yet more innovation for organizations such as UNHCR.

Indeed, our curiosity to iterate, our curiosity to try out the new, our curiosity to adopt and adapt has been a part of who we are since the beginning. UNHCR was born from innovation. It's central to our efforts to protect, it's central to our efforts to assist. It's central to our efforts to exist as a humanitarian and protection agency.
UNHCR has always been innovating. Currently, in Quito, Diego Nardi is working on challenges around how we communicate with communities. In our Global Learning Centre, Clarisse Ntampaka is working out how to train people on protection more effectively. In Nairobi, Sandra Aluoch and Kent Awiti are scaling connected learning across Africa. At Headquarters, Andrew Harper is working out with Noriko Takagi how to better measure UNHCR's impact. Salvatore Vassallo is working out how to scale backend processes that further enable the scaling of projects such as the Higher Education Accelerator. Netta Rankin is grappling with Artificial Intelligence and human resources systems. The commitment and efforts to innovate exist in our organization, in the obvious but also in the prosaic. They exist agnostic of age, and professional profile, and they exist because of a huge diversity of thought.

The world for refugees and others forcibly displaced has already and will become

even more complex. And our raison d'etre: protection of forcibly displaced people, will become increasingly more complicated. Our ability to change and adapt, our ability to innovate, will either greatly improve the provision of protection and assistance to these people, or it will not.

I'm not making the case for innovation being a panacea, I'm saying that it's an important tool, an important part of what we do, and how we do it—including how we solve challenges big and small.

At such a complicated and complex time, we must not only invest in innovation but also our ability to effectively change and adapt. Five things that I've been trying to grapple with when I think about how our service can support UNHCR in 2019 and beyond:

People are moving in different ways. They have better information, make better informed decisions and are experiencing new pressures. The nature of movement also seems to be changing, with people moving to different geographies in different ways, and in different numbers. Having been displaced, people are seeking better livelihoods opportunities whilst displaced, more and more people are moving to urban areas, to cities. More and more people are going to Amman, Nairobi, Panama, and Berlin. As border walls go up, more and more cities are recognising the value that displaced people bring to them—recognising the value of diversity, and the contributions that people bring to cities. We can use innovation to move and to respond differently, we can use innovation to have a better idea of what that movement is, what it looks like, to anticipate it better.

People are moving differently, which also means we need to respond differently. We must experiment more around what a dignified existence looks like, whether in the suburbs of Kabul, or the inner cities of Kampala, Kinshasa, Bogota, Mexico City, and Rome. Sometimes that means capitalising on our experience of working in places such as Peshawar, or Assosa, translating lessons learned into new approaches. Sometimes this is going to mean completely new approaches that we need to generate knowledge around and through.

The physical world in which we live is also changing. The climate is changing. And we know that this interacts with the decisions people make to move. It interacts with resources available to people. It interacts with the nature of conflict. Through our work predicting displacement in Somalia, we know that the weather in Western Australia has a direct impact on the weather in Somalia. It's called the Indian Ocean Dipole. We need to be more aware of these global climatic changes and what we can expect of them in the future. Our member states are already doing this, private sector organizations are preparing for these changes within the geographies that they operate, thinking very much about how the behaviours of their customers will change, as their needs—perceived as well as real—adjust. Some are in the process of preparing to completely change their business models. We need to be prepared to also make big changes in how we understand future contexts, and how we provide different services to those we serve, in turn.

Technology is also changing at a rate that we cannot keep up with. We are seeing technology emerge from all corners of our planet. Some of it empowers us. It enables citizens to express their opinions, and to attain proximity to leaders, and to organizations, that was previously impossible. I can tweet to Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda, and he might respond. I can express my opinion on the most recent iteration of an approach to Brexit. I can connect, and I can engage in ways that I would never have imagined. And refugees can do the same. We must ensure that we are ready and able to engage in the ways that people now expect us to be able to. But we must also ensure that we're ready to change our approaches based on feedback provided through the engagements that are now possible.

We are also able to influence the way in which technology is developed—and why. We can inspire. But we must inspire ethical production methods across our sector and beyond. We must ensure that end-users are consulted. We must ensure that the most vulnerable are consulted, ensuring that they are not left behind, to ensure that their needs are taken into account so that technology does not evolve for the most powerful, for the rich, for the mobile. So when we look to the future, and signals of emerging technology, emerging algorithms, new ways to create insights, we need to be able to influence not only the how, but also the why. The values of 'we the people' must be reflected in the future. We need approaches that motivate the private sector to be more ethical and accountable.

Looking back to push forward

In 2017, UNHCR's Innovation Service embarked upon another ambitious agenda of change to its own approaches. It sought to make innovation as accessible as possible to as many people as possible. We sought to look at different types of innovation approaches, from incremental innovation engines, to accelerators and scaling. We trained more Innovation Fellows, we trained entire operations, providing them with the knowledge, the processes, and promising innovation practises. We challenged bureaucracy. We served an organization that knew it needed to change—and wanted to. The approach and efforts reflected the people that make up the organization that we serve. This includes people who don't necessarily self-identify as innovators that creatively work the bureaucracy the world over. Those communicating the hows, whos, and whys of what we do. Those creating evidence and insights for change, those creating partnerships, those working on frontline efforts to communicate and better protect.
In 2018, we continued on a path of change, seeking to base our work more explicitly on the values that our Service stands for. We thought that being values-driven would make us even more accessible to more

people, so we looked beyond what seem to be becoming the more established models for innovation in the UN and humanitarian fields. We've always shied away from articulating our definition of innovation and instead have tried to articulate the behaviours that represent the mindsets that we need to see the length and breadth of the organization. So, we embraced transparency, collaboration, we embraced our curiosity and our willingness to learn. Perhaps most crucially, we embraced an agenda of diversity and inclusion.

We recognised the importance of the diversity of thought that exists within the organization, and that we need to make the most of this. We recognised that diversity is meaningless without corresponding inclusivity. We needed to create more opportunities to exchange, and discuss. That meant that we more actively engaged those who don't necessarily self-present as innovators. So we worked with the 'deep Headquarters', such as Human Resources, Legal Affairs, as well as the so-called 'deep-field' colleagues. We used Artificial Intelligence to spot patterns, and to support humans in their endeavours to make better decisions. What we found was that using values made us closer to more people. Innovation became more principled, much easier to understand, and therefore yet again more accessible. All the while we created more lessons and more insights.
We learned that more work is needed to create that culture of innovation, or rather, to more explicitly recognise and embrace that culture. We learned that more work is needed to create bureaucratic spaces where innovation can thrive. We learned that a stronger compass is needed for us to guide our direction, and that requires a more robust method to look into the future. And we learned that these three things need to happen together.

In 2019, this Service is going to try to take another brave step forward. And it's a step firmly into the future of displacement. It's one that invests in the now, for the future. It's one that creates the enabling environment for innovation now, but looks to the future to guide the what, and the how of the investments needed now for that future. The UN General Assembly has adopted a new framework: the Global Compact for Refugees, which also gives us an opportunity to up our game, to up our aims to match this new framework.

Actions we're taking

For 2019, I propose a new agenda for innovation within UNHCR and beyond. It's an agenda that questions and interrogates the more commonly associated nomenclature of Labs and Accelerators, UAVs, and 3D Printing.

The first thing that we need to do is that we again need to drive diversity and more inclusive approaches to innovation across our operations and at Headquarters. Too often our innovation stories are dominated by males, and too often we see our innovation teams focus only on technology, perhaps a hapless hope that tech will save us. And that just isn't true. This results in approaches that are at worst, divisive and exclusionary. At best, it risks distilling innovation into something that many people just do not understand.

So, our first agenda item is to expand our efforts to build a stronger culture and set of competencies around innovation, within UNHCR and beyond, so we're going to double-down on these efforts. The Fellowship will continue. But we'll open it up to more partners, we'll open it up to more people who want to learn about the tools and methodologies, the approaches, that underpin this important work.

We will take another 25–30 individuals who go through a competitive selection process, through an intense 12 months of innovating together with their colleagues. These individuals are an inspiration to our Service, and to UNHCR. They have a history of innovating already. They are out there somewhere, pushing boundaries, trying to nudge our organization and others into the future. They will sometimes feel very exposed, sometimes unsupported, and many times simply frustrated. They're essential for the future UNHCR that future generations will inherit.

We're also going to continue much-needed support through our workplace innovation approaches but we're going to do that through projects rather than carrying out training only for whole offices. We'll do that concurrently with requests for support from field operations, and from HQ entities, so that we're matching projects with knowledge transfer around innovation—building that capacity by doing. We realised that we're often missing a step when it comes to project support, and that step is around competency building.

So whilst we can go to Nigeria, or Uganda, or Tanzania, or the Americas, or support any number of operations remotely; the friends, colleagues, and partners who are trying to drive change, also need the skills to drive that change.

For managers of innovators, we need to put more effort into recognising their own efforts in creating space for innovation to happen. They also need to feel empowered, and informed. They should know when, how, and who it takes for innovation to happen. When they should embark upon an innovation process. They also need the knowledge and expertise to innovate. So we're also going to step up our efforts to support our colleagues who have been with us for a longer period of time.

Those who have been innovating our organization for decades—but perhaps do not see themselves as innovators. As with any other tools and methodologies, innovation has created new tools and new methodologies that at times scare people. The language used, the nomenclature, the association with technology, can make innovation the opposite of what it needs to be: it alienates and becomes inaccessible for those who want to be involved but just don't know how. For some, who are now managers, this means simply creating spaces for innovation. Spaces of diversity and inclusion, spaces to discuss, to talk, to share ideas, and to identify problems. So

we're going to work with these colleagues who we look to somewhat as our north stars, our institutional knowledge, our mentors, managers, and leaders, and we're going to make sure that they understand how best they can lift others up.

Secondly, this agenda must closely align itself with other changes that are needed in order to drive for sustainable approaches to innovation. We see an endless cycle of pilots and experiments the world over, which never reach 'scale'. Time and time again we scratch our heads, baffled by why projects didn't reach more people. And simply put, that's because our approaches to scale have not been invested in sufficiently well. And I'm not referring to money. I'm referring to how we not only record and share lessons learned, but how we then convert those into actions beyond our own Service.

We also reflected that cookie-cutter approaches to innovation will only relegate innovation to a gentle tinkering around the edges. For the future of UNHCR, and indeed the UN, we will need braver approaches. More certainty in what we're doing. More courage in doing it.

Approaches that challenge the very bureaucracies that at times protect, but at times stifle, and inhibit. We must be sure that we want the changes that the rhetoric seems to indicate. Transformational changes are needed from within our bureaucracies to scale up, to scale out, to increase value in what we're doing, to scale the processes of scaling, to make innovations more successful for more people. We can challenge some of the assumptions that underlie the often seemingly rigid bureaucracies that seek to protect our institutions, as long as we use the tools of dialogue and respect. We have to do this strategically. Collaboratively.

Our commitment rests with those we serve, and those in the front lines in the field, and the front lines at HQ, and everything in between: a UNHCR that is ready for the future of displacement, and an Innovation Service that helps us all to get there.

We have to work more closely with the people who don't necessarily self-identify as innovators, but certainly make innovation happen. In our recent past, we've seen Programme Officers make decisions to invest in partners, to invest their time and efforts into making somewhat non-traditional partnerships work out. We've seen Administration Offices find ways through the sometimes challenging procedures to provide resources to staff in unusual ways. We've seen human resources staff work out how to hire those profiles we need for the future of our organization. These people need more support, and frankly, more recognition for their efforts.

The third thing we're going to do is invest in the future. Gaining a deeper understanding of how changes occurring now and in the next emerging decade(s) change will impact not just our world, but specifically on those that are displaced. This is essential to ensure that our business model and service delivery is robust enough to not just withstand those changes, but that it is agile enough to navigate these emerging complexities and to be fit for purpose.

We are an organization that is constantly responding to crises of displacement. But constantly responding to the issues of today runs the risk that we might lose touch with what is emerging in the ecosystem around us. This in turn puts our organization at a real risk of not being able to be better prepared for the crises of the future, continuing to run the same types of services and programmes that might not be relevant.

Whilst we can't predict the future, we can prepare for it—by ensuring that our organization can be agile and flexible enough to creatively respond to the possibilities that might arise.

Investing in potential futures means that we can invest in experiments and innovations today that would place us in good stead for what might emerge, and be able to respond more effectively and efficiently. This will require investing in non-traditional partners who can help build the future we envision.

This agenda is more courageous than any of the agendas we've previously set in that it looks much more deeply at what needs to change, in really quite complex parts of our organization. And so should it be. It's in UNHCR's character to try to be so. It's the character of the partners we work with. We cannot do this alone. We must match the ambition, with the ethics and morals of the UN, together with the best brains that exist also outside of our organization. These brains exist often in people who do not work for UNHCR. People who do not work in 'the field'. We must partner to achieve these ambitions, we must partner to challenge our own assumptions. And we must partner to learn, and to adapt.

So our 2019 approach to innovation is even more challenging than any we have used before. It's a big departure from the Labs approach we started out with in 2012. It's an approach that looks forward, as well as critically at the prosaic spaces of our organization and at the same time recognising what more we can do to adapt our culture, as well as the competencies that we need in order to innovate for that future existence. I think it's more determined. It's more inclusive than we had ever intended previously. And it's bolder because of all of this.

Our commitment rests with those we serve, and those in the front lines in the field, and the front lines at HQ, and everything in between: a UNHCR that is ready for the future of displacement, and an Innovation Service that helps us all to get there.

UNHCR's Innovation Fellowship

Driving innovation through mindset and cultural change.

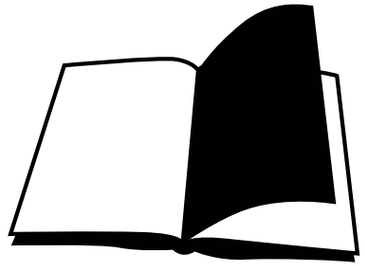
The UNHCR Innovation Fellowship is a year-long learning programme for UNHCR's workforce. The Fellowship programme focuses on building Innovation Fellows' innovation skills and competencies in addition to supporting them to facilitate innovation with colleagues, partners, and refugees in their own operations or divisions. Over the course of the year, Innovation Fellows learn and use innovation methods, tools, and embed new approaches in innovation projects. They focus on problem-solving, ideation, and experimenting solutions to real-life challenges in the field or at Headquarters. They are the organization's ambassadors for innovation and lasting positive change.

The Fellowship is grounded in the idea that to have sustainable innovation you need to focus on mindset change and culture. We believe the only way to achieve this is to change individual behaviours at all levels of the organization. The programme encourages continuous learning, challenging assumptions, and perspectives, the value of collaboration and openness for failure and risk-taking. It is a mindset that leads staff to question if there is a better way of working, communicating, and thinking.

Each year approximately 25 UNHCR staff and affiliates are chosen as UNHCR Innovation Fellows. The Fellows go through an innovation journey in their duty stations together with their colleagues, partners, and refugees. They also participate in two workshops, one in Bangkok and one in Istanbul, where they learn about experimentation, positive influencing, and how to create better outcomes for their operations and UNHCR's constituency. if you want to learn more about the Fellowship, go to: unhcr.org/innovation/innovation-fellowship/

The origin of UNHCR Innovation

UNHCR has always innovated - so what's the story behind the creation of the organization's Innovation Service?



Nestled in the right side of UNHCR's building basement is a small team, surrounded by meeting rooms frequently occupied by staff from all over the building, there sits a space that hopes to reimagine the way in which UNHCR approaches its efforts to protect refugees; UNHCR's Innovation Service. But before I delve deeper into what is meant by reimagining the way in which UNHCR protects refugees, I want to spotlight how such a space came to be. At the most basic level, the evolution of UNHCR's Innovation Service is a bit like a story arc. And with every story, we have characters, a struggle, often a villain, and the fact that nothing really works out until the very end.

So, let's start at the very beginning. In 2011, former High Commissioner Antonio Guterres recognized that UNHCR was at an innovation crossroads; while UNHCR has always been innovating, there had never been a space to capture, reward, and facilitate innovation in the organization. In response to such a concern, a small group of ambitious individuals came together and formed, as Chris Earney, current Head, a.i., of UNHCR's Innovation Service, anecdotally described it, an even more ambitious roadmap. As Chris would further elaborate in an interview, the roadmap detailed an innovation initiative that centered funding and supporting innovation projects, a coordination group, thematically focused innovation "labs", private sector partnerships, a UNHCR Innovation Fellows network, and field centers for innovation. Given how small the team was, it is pretty clear now that this roadmap set goals that were perhaps too ambitious, and they were. The team became aware as they attempted to achieve the set goals that they simply did not have the capacity to achieve them. And although the team did not really accomplish much of what it hoped in its initial stages, this awareness served as the team's first initial experience with failure, an experience Chris later describes as being one of the most crucial aspects of innovation and experimentation.

From there, the founding members of what would eventually become the UNHCR Innovation Unit reworked the roadmap to adopt a more organically flowing one geared towards understanding what innovation in UNHCR truly meant. As with all innovation initiatives, they wanted to understand what the real challenges for driving innovation into all corners of the organization actually were. They started working closely with field operations in Southeast Ethiopia and the Middle East, in which the initiative's efforts mainly focused on working on innovative projects that the working group and field operations came up with, most of which failed. At the same time, the team started to put other structures in place, which included the Innovation Fellowship, a year-long program designed for UNHCR's workforce to develop as innovators and enablers of innovation within the organization. In its early stages, the Fellowship was a project-focused initiative that emphasized the value of a single innovator within an organization that has always been innovating, but not necessarily fostering it.

As members of the team initially adopted a partnership-driven approach, they established vital partnerships with the private sector, including the IKEA Foundation and the UPS Foundation. In securing such partnerships, multiple other innovative projects took off, including the Refugee Housing Unit (RHU), described by Chris as "one of the best projects we probably had quite a heavy hand in." As the procurement documents that underlined the development of RHU described it, RHU was an "innovative shelter solution, designed as a result of a research and development project undertaken by the Refugee Housing Unit RHU AB, Sweden, and UNHCR, with the support of the IKEA Foundation." The project adopted what was described as a "gateway" or "milestone approach to innovation and product development, centered around, and notice my explicit use of quotation here, "prototyping." But the RHU was quite the success and was proof of the value of private-sector partnerships; the funding offered by the IKEA Foundation and the pro bono research done by various private academic institutions was the basis of this project's success.

The team further adopted thematic approaches to innovation in the form of labs, which largely looked at livelihoods, data and communication, energy and environment, and education. Most of the labs were co-sponsored by respective units within UNHCR: the Emergency Lab was a collaboration between UNHCR Innovation and the Division of Emergency, Security, and Supply, the Learn Lab was a collaboration between UNHCR Innovation and UNHCR's Division of International Protection, and the Energy Lab with UNHCR's Energy and

Environment team. This was an attempt at emphasizing both the project-driven and partnership-focused framework of the UNHCR Innovation Unit at the time, and it came out of the need to address the larger communication problem within UNHCR within in-house units, especially as it pertains to how people perceived UNHCR Innovation's role. There was initially a lack of collaboration between in-house units and the Innovation Unit at the time, as there was a perception that UNHCR Innovation was competing with other in-house units, as opposed to providing grounds for support. Theoretically, through the labs, inter-unit collaboration could be achieved to work on a few of the most innovative initiatives across the UN, and for a while, such was the case. The Learn Lab developed education projects in refugee communities through connected learning, the Energy Lab developed projects that utilized clean energy, and so on.

As you can probably tell by now, the team was adopting projects that were largely focused on field efforts and future-oriented projects that were sustainable and tangible. And although there were many successes in field operations, there was a clear tension present in attempting to achieve such feats throughout the various divisions involved. The hope that the labs would somehow integrate UNHCR Innovation into various other divisions and units within the organization was not realized. Instead, as Chris describes it, the efforts "became exclusive" to what the labs embodied and innovation became inaccessible; because the labs were so product-based and centered on creating a unique solution, innovation became exclusive to a very restricted idea of problem-solving.

UNHCR Innovation realized their villain was their decision to base their culture of innovation on a Silicon Valley born, technically structured, jargon-infused notion of innovation. In late 2016, it was time to test the assumptions that underlined the strategy in place, and over the past two years, the now UNHCR Innovation decided to shift the strategy to increase accessibility to innovation. Such accessibility can now be defined as the driving factor of the Service.

At the most basic level, UNHCR Innovation changed linguistically, creating a semantic change in its approach to innovation. The team adopted a "Service" label as opposed to a "Unit" label, emphasizing a collaborative notion that attempted to break down the Silicon Valley startup perceived image of the team. Instead of being labeled as an independent unit functioning as and representing all that is innovation in UNHCR, the team is now a service that actively aims to nurture innovation already present within the various divisions and teams that make up UNHCR. The team even stopped using technical jargon that further alienated those unaccustomed to notions of innovation; instead of "prototyping," the team advocates for experimenting, instead of "human-centered design thinking," the team advocates for a more general, open-to-interpretation, user-centered innovation process.

UNHCR's Innovation Service transformed itself to become focused on innovative people, rather than innovative products. The Service amplified the projects that fit such notions of user-led design and people-focused efforts, such as the Innovation Fellowship, and removed those that acted as lessons learned to for collaborative efforts of innovation, such as the Innovation Labs. The Service started and continues to move towards a multi-functional approach, because it realized that the innovation process cannot be subdivided into clear thematics and functionalities, but is rather an interwoven process of intersectional approaches.

Right now, as Chris describes it, the Service functions on three pillars. It focuses on culture and competency building in hopes of socializing internal innovation, making it more accessible and expanding our rather limited definition of innovation; transformative change which hopes to support larger projects, and scale in hopes of expanding upon and enriching the process of innovation both within UNHCR and outside of it; and finally futures which explores how to prepare the organization for the future of displacement and the complex challenges that underpin it. The Service now operates more as a cohesive team, highly emphasizing the importance of communication both within and outside of the team. They set out an alternative approach for innovation—one that relies less on data analysis and more on imagination, experimentation, and communication. When asked about how the team functions now compared to past variations of itself, Chris exclaimed: "The team works more cohesively, we really evolved."

So, what's this evolution Chris is talking about? Well, let's see. When it comes to socializing internal innovation and making it more accessible, UNHCR's Innovation Service maintained and modified the Innovation Fellowship to "also aim to facilitate longer-term change management as it encourages Fellows to be innovative in their current and future roles within the organization." The team is also experimenting with public interest communication as their main means of communication, which applies a science-driven framework and approach to better understand UNHCR's function in the humanitarian field, drive innovation more quickly, and create behavioral and cultural change. Over the past two years, the Service has also launched the Innovation Fund, which has been designed to "facilitate the development of innovative projects and solutions for UNHCR operations, units and bureaus by providing funding to innovators who wish to design, test or scale up their ideas". This not only supports greater accessibility, but also allows room for incremental innovation.

Did you notice so far the innovation the Service dabbled in hasn't been completely tech-centered? You did? Good. The tech villain is dead. This notion of always emphasizing modernization, emphasizing a tech-centered notion of innovation that grew out of the prevailing start-up mentality of Silicon Valley is no longer what drives the team. Does that mean there is no room for technology in innovation? Of

course not, that would be, at the very least, a gravely naive thing to say about innovation. There is room for high forms of tech in innovation. For example, the Service launched Project Jetson, “an experimental project that combines data science, design, and strategic communications to predict population movements in the Horn of Africa, starting with Somalia,” a rathe and revolutionary form of disruptive innovation. What the Service will want to emphasize, however, is that although Project Jetson is a great example of innovation, it is not the only example or application of it.

In the end, if there’s one thing you should take from this story, it’s definitely not what I’m about to say next, but read on, because the metaphor lives on. UNHCR’s Innovation Service is composed of a small team who are dedicated to instilling the values of innovation both within UNHCR and outside of it. And although it regularly faced failures and setbacks throughout the past seven years, the Innovation Service grew into becoming a more active, people-oriented hub of continuous change in the UNHCR, and it only hopes to further grow and instill such constantly changing values within the organization. I know I said this team was nestled on the right side of UNHCR’s basement at the start of this post, but they’re not anymore. As of last summer, they now have an office one floor above what used to house the innovation cave. It’s the same team, with the same vision, now just a little brighter with the support of windows they always hoped for in their office. And if that doesn’t scream growth for you, I don’t know what does.

But on a more serious note, the team’s approach went from supporting projects, developing a narrow understanding of innovation, and prioritizing partnerships, to supporting people, emphasizing inclusivity in our ability to innovate, and prioritizing capacity building and changing the culture of innovation. This is not the end of this story, but rather the beginning of its integration into the greater UNHCR story. Make sure to read on, friends. There’s a lot more innovation to come.

A brief innovation glossary

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Creativity

The use of imagination or original ideas to create something new.[1] Tendency to recognise or generate ideas.

Imagination

The ability of the mind to be creative or resourceful.[2] Imagination is the heart of creativity.

Invention

A new, unique or novel idea, device, method, process or discovery.[3]

Inventor

Someone who comes up with new ideas and concepts that may or may not lead to innovations.[4]

Intrapreneur

An employee who innovates within an organization. The practice of developing a new venture within an existing organization, to exploit a new opportunity and create economic (or other) value.[5]

Innovation

The process of translating an idea or invention into a good or service that creates

1 Oxford Dictionary
2 Oxford Dictionary
3 Strategic Management of Technology and Innovation. CTI Reviews.
4 Lean Ventures International AB
5 Gifford Pinchot

value.[6] The implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practises, workplace organization or external relations.[7]

Innovation process

We have a five-step process: 1) Understand and define the problem or opportunity; 2) Identify solutions (search for existing solutions and create new ones); 3) Test potential solutions; 4) Refine solutions; 5) Scale solutions. The process is not linear and it is not considered complete, as we seek to continually iterate.

Prototyping and testing

A prototype is a small-scale, tangible representation of an idea or solution (or part of it) that people can directly experience. Prototyping allows you to communicate your idea or solution to others in an interactive way, try ideas out quickly and gather feedback easily. The prototype is tested to make sure it is fit for the purpose and users' need. Based on the feedback, the prototype is improved and tested again.[8]

Radical (or discontinuous) innovation

Innovations with features offering dramatic improvements in performance or cost, which result in the transformation of existing markets or creation of new ones.[9] New to the world.

Incremental innovation

An improvement or refinement in performance, cost, reliability, design, etc. to an existing product, service or process. New to the organization, but not to the world.

Disruptive innovation

An innovation that transforms an existing market or sector by introducing simplicity, convenience, accessibility, and affordability where complication and high cost are the status quo.[10]

Agile

Agile is a project management methodology that uses short development cycles to focus on continuous improvement in the development of a product or service.[11]

Design thinking

Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.[12]

6 BusinessDictionary
7 OECD
8 TD4Ed - Teachers Design for Education
9 Innovation-3 consulting agency
10 The Clayton Christensen Institute
11 CIO
12 Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO

Service Design

Service design is a process in which the designer focuses on creating optimal service experiences. This requires taking a holistic view of all the related actors, their interactions, and supporting materials and infrastructures. Service design often involves the use of customer journey maps, which tell the story of different customers' interactions with a brand, thus offering deep insights.[13]

Human-Centered Design (HCD)

Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem-solving. It's a process that starts with the people you're designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailor made to suit their needs. Human-centered design is about building a deep empathy with the people you're designing for; generating tons of ideas; building a bunch of prototypes; sharing what you've made with the people you're designing for; and eventually putting your innovative new solution out in the world.[14]

Social Innovation

A social innovation is a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than current solutions. The value created accrues primarily to society rather than to private individuals.[15]

Open innovation

An innovation process in which the ideas are contributed from members outside of the organization and from the public at large.[16]

Piloting

A pilot program, also called a feasibility study or experimental trial, is a small-scale, short-term experiment that helps an organization learn how a large-scale project might work in practice. A pilot provides a platform for the organization to test logistics, prove value and reveal deficiencies before spending a significant amount of time, energy or money on a large-scale project.[17]

Ideation

A structured process to generate a lot of ideas, preferably in a relatively short time frame. There are many different ideation techniques, e.g., brainstorming and empathy maps.[18]

Brainstorming

An idea generation (ideation) technique. Process for generating creative ideas and solutions through intensive and free-wheeling group discussion. Every participant is encouraged to think aloud and suggest as many ideas as possible, no matter seemingly how outlandish or

13 Interaction Design Foundation
14 DesignKit by Ideo.org
15 Stanford Graduate School of Business
16 Wharton University of Pennsylvania
17 SearchCIO.com
18 Lean Ventures International AB

bizarre. Analysis, discussion, or criticism of the aired ideas is allowed only when the brainstorming session is over and evaluation session begins.[19]

End-users

Individuals who ultimately use or are intended to use a product or service. End-users are the starting point of the innovation process.

Facilitation

Facilitation is about taking a leadership role in innovation process (instead of content). The facilitator remains “neutral” meaning he/she does not take a particular position in the discussion. Innovation facilitators help to unleash the creative potential in people who own the content by creating and managing the environment so that each individual is able to contribute their best.[20]

Product innovation

Changes in the things (products/services) which an organization offers.

Process innovation

Changes in the way in which they are created and delivered.

Position innovation

Changes in the context in which the products/services are introduced.

Paradigm innovation

Changes in the underlying mental models which frame what the organization does.[21]

19 BusinessDictionary

20 The Creative Problem-solving Group Inc. Understanding the Role of a Facilitator

21 4Ps of Innovation by ©2005 Joe Tidd, John Bessant, Keith Pavitt

UNHCR Innovation Service

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