

MANAGING THE INNOVATION PROCESS: Searching for Innovation Ideas (Excerpted from the SPARK Innovation Model)

The first 'port of call' for the innovation journey is to identify new ideas and new opportunities for innovation.

The new idea can come solely from the strategic analysis of the management team. For instance if the exercises discussed in the previous section reveal the need for social enterprises to develop its distribution channels, then ideas have to be invited on how to do this. All ideas, including the most 'crazy' ones should be considered at this stage, no matter how far they are from the 'standard' views of the management team (or even of their industry peers).

The new ideas can come also from people or organisations outside. People who tend to shed doubt on 'social conventions' (e.g. artists) or established standards and practices (e.g. lead users that is users that are ahead of their time) are probably the best to source ideas from. A social enterprise may be able to identify a social or environmental issue after talking to artists – e.g. why such a large number of geese are exterminated by a city to protect its electricity distribution network and other parts of its infrastructure.

Equally scientists and experts with the deep knowledge of a topic may be able to identify an opportunity for innovation by responding to clearly set questions (e.g. how to limit the impact of a pollution problem, how urban spaces can contribute to the production of agricultural products etc.).

At this stage, the social enterprise should ensure that it is connected to places where such people gather and establish channels of communication with them.

What does this mean for me?

From a practical perspective there are a two main ways to search for innovation ideas

- Environmental scanning - looking for inspiration
- Using structured approaches to ideation

Environmental scanning - looking for inspiration

Social entrepreneurs tend to be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things.

This behaviour can be used in environmental scanning for innovation ideas. Environmental scanning is a process that monitors the external world, its competitors and itself.

Typical tools include SWOT and PESTLE, risk registers, industry and market research.

3.1 Searching for Innovation Ideas

How does market research work?

You can start by completing a stakeholder analysis. This will help you consider all the people that matter for your social enterprise. The market research should focus in particular on the groups you have identified as customers and/or beneficiaries. It may also include your managers, staff or volunteers that have ideas about how you may do things differently.

Good market research doesn't need to be costly but should be practical and realistic. It is strongly recommended that you combine primary or direct research with secondary research.

Primary research involves directly investigating what your customers and your beneficiaries' needs are (if they are different). You should ask them how they feel about your product or service, what they expect from it, how much they would be prepared to pay for it and whether they would purchase similar products or services from competitors.

- Have an idea of who you want to speak to or hear from
- Have an idea of what you want to know
- Sometimes it is good to have an idea of what you want to hear
- Think about where/how you will get the information e.g. surveys, interview or focus groups

Secondary research involves looking at existing information about your potential market either online or from government reports, local statistics, trade journals and any relevant published market information.

- Trade associations for sector specific trends and developments
- Industry and professional bodies for sectoral information
- Articles in the media or research publications
- Online research (competitors' websites etc.)

Using structured approaches to ideation

There are many structured approaches to creating new ideas for products and services (ideation). See the Dig Deeper section for further details.



Practical tools A summary of practical (attention directing) approaches to ideation

Approach	Explanation
Inversion	Turn the common practice "upside down"
Integration	Bundle your offer with other offers

3.1 Searching for Innovation Ideas

Extension	Expand who you provide services to
Repurpose	Put a product, service or process to another use
Differentiation	Stand out for certain parts of your market
Addition	Add something now to an existing product or service
Subtraction	Take something away from an existing product or service
Translation / parallel universe	Translate a practice form another field as a whole new product or service
Grafting	Graft, or add on a practice form another field to an existing product or service
Exaggeration	Develop one aspect of your products or service to an extreme
See	2.1.4_3.1_Fast Idea Generator.docx for more detail, Source: NESTA



Dig Deeper

- Environmental Analysis tools
 - SWOT
 - Pestle
 - Porter’s Five Force
 - Secondary research tools – reading what people think
- Ideation tools
 - Eduard de Bono’s 6 hats, Moment to Moment, Other People’s Views etc.
 - Constrained innovation / constrained effectuation
 - Future scenarios
 - Researching ideas
 - OpenIDEO tools, <https://challenges.openideo.com/content/openideo-ideation-tools>
 - Primary research - asking people