

BRIDGIUM

HOW INNOVATION HAPPENS

Insights from Leading Enterprises in
Times of Change 2026

Bridgium is a high-impact joint research initiative by Albi Marketing Oy and Digitune Oy and dedicated to dive deep into the phenomenon of innovation.

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Welcome to the Bridgium Innovation Study Report 2025. It examines how ideas progress from initial articulation to shared, concrete form and into routine practice. The report highlights the structural conditions and horizontal communication that enable these transitions and offers a shared language to align teams. At Wärtsilä, innovation is embedded in everyday work and connected to our operations. Cross-functional teams turn improvements into standard practice and build organisational learning. A focus on customer value, efficiency, and competitiveness guides prioritisation and investment as ideas narrow into stronger business cases. We believe in the importance of collaboration and coordinated communications in ensuring that experimentation leads to impactful outcomes. I invite you to dive into the report to discover practical frameworks, real examples, and clear insights you can apply today to turn ideas into impact.



**Eleonor Hedström,
Director, Next Business Lab,
Wärtsilä Energy**

“

Large organisations often look at startups and wonder how they move so fast. The answer is not culture or creativity. It is that startups have fewer places for ideas to die.

In complex organisations, innovation rarely fails because people lack ideas. It fails because ideas run out of road - stalling at handovers, dissolving when ownership shifts, or quietly vanishing after a successful pilot that nobody adopts. These are structural failures, not creative ones.

This report makes those failure points visible. The three-stage framework gives leaders a practical diagnostic lens: not just where innovation breaks, but why. In an era when AI and market disruption are compressing decision cycles, understanding how ideas lose momentum is no longer a theoretical exercise. It is a leadership priority.

I commend the Bridgium team for producing research that is both rigorous and immediately actionable.

Louis Strydom,
Director of Growth & Development (Europe & Africa),
Wärtsilä Energy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations today operate in a context of continuous transformation. Technologies evolve faster than people can absorb them. Inside companies, this tension rarely appears as a lack of ideas. Instead, it shows up as difficulty moving ideas forward: problems are noticed but not voiced, pilots succeed but are not adopted and promising initiatives fade before becoming everyday practice.

This study addresses a practical question:

How do innovation ideas move from being felt but unspoken to becoming adopted and operational inside real organizations?

To answer this, we conducted 28 in-depth interviews with innovation experts from leading Nordic and European enterprises across multiple industries. Respondents described how innovation unfolds in their everyday work.

A key contribution of this study is that it makes *implicit and silent signals explicit*. When people do not speak up, disengage or stop working on ideas, the reasons often remain invisible. By tracing how innovation moves across stages, the framework explains *how and why* silence, fragmentation, or drop-off occur, rather than treating them as individual or cultural issues.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

We apply a social science lens to examine innovation as a flow through the organization. Through qualitative analysis of interview narratives, we identified recurring patterns that explain how ideas progress or stall.

The study distinguishes three stages of innovation, each with different risks and enabling conditions: making ideas speakable (Externalization), making ideas shared and concrete (Objectivation) and making ideas stick (Internalization). This approach makes visible the often-overlooked conditions that enable ideas to move across roles, teams and operational boundaries.



KEY CONCEPTS AND CROSS-CUTTING INSIGHTS

Innovation functions *as a flow* - an operational process that must be legitimate and predictable for people to engage. One expert described managing this as *orchestration*: coordinating expectations, timing, and handovers across stages. As ideas progress, the balance between structure and communication shifts: structure provides legitimacy and stability, while communication enables movement and transition.

Innovation capital refers to insight embedded in everyday work, while *innovation memory* captures the ability to retain and build on prior efforts. *Feedback loops* and *recognition* fuel transitions by linking effort to outcomes and reinforcing continued participation.



MAIN FINDINGS

Our findings show that innovation unfolds as a *flow shaped by interaction, ownership and operational conditions*. Ideas must pass through a sequence of transitions before they become solutions or products. Innovation outcomes are often determined at these transitions rather than by idea quality or execution capability alone.

Each stage of innovation involves a distinct management logic that becomes relevant as ideas move forward. Across the flow, people engage when innovation work is legitimate and when the likely outcomes are predictable. People's connectivity and communication plays a crucial role. Concrete meaning of these conditions changes at each transition. When stage-specific conditions are not aligned, *innovation capital* remains unused, *innovation memory* is lost and responsibility weakens at handovers. In these situations, innovation stalls even when ideas and motivation are strong.

Across all stages, three enabling conditions recur:

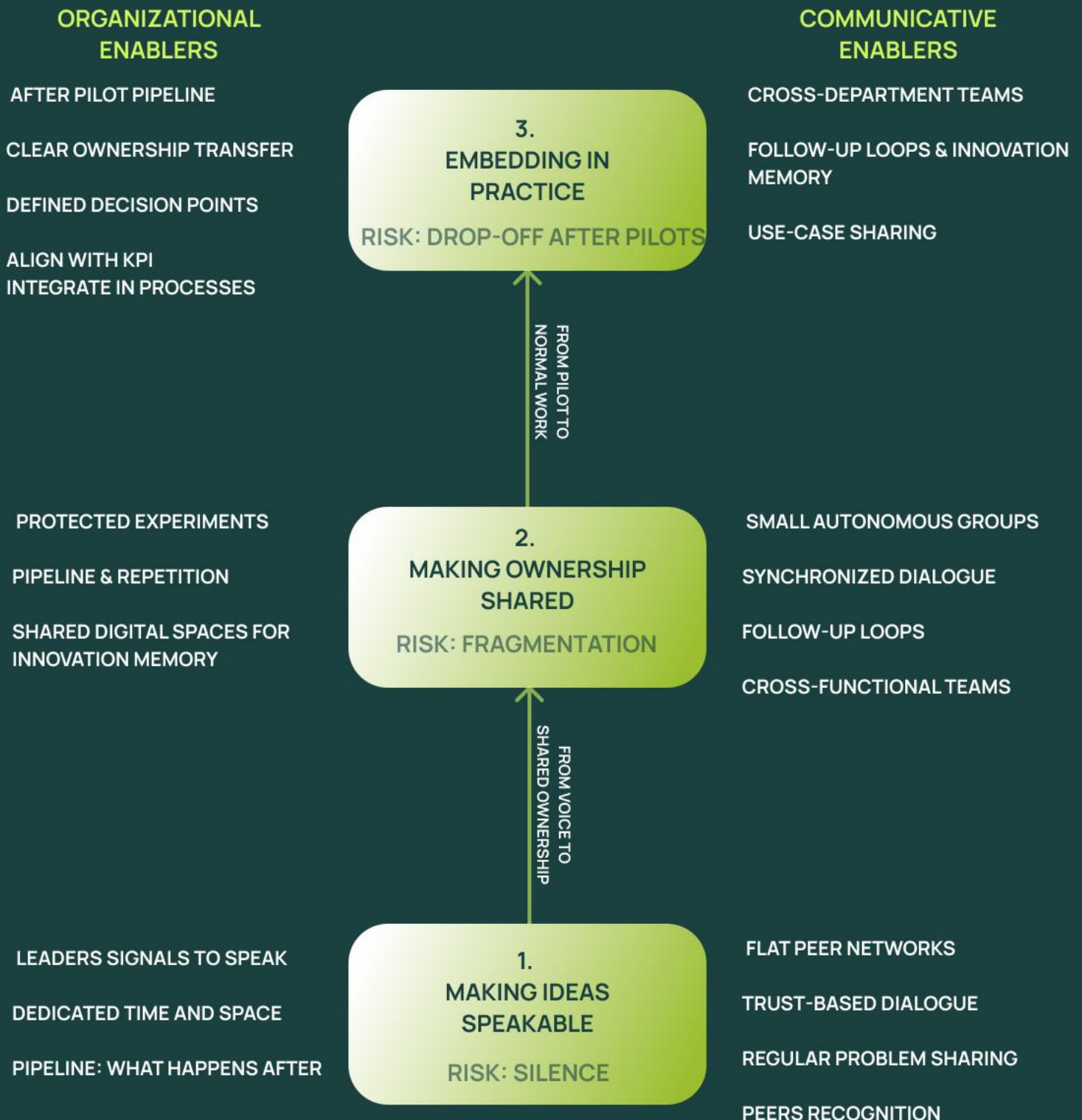
- *Legitimacy* – clear signals from leaders, that innovation-related work is acceptable;
- *Predictability* – which allows people to assess whether effort will lead anywhere;
- *Connectivity* - which enables ideas to travel across organizational boundaries.
- *Innovation memory* – mechanisms that retain learning from pilots and discussions, keeping ideas visible over time.

These conditions are constant across the innovation flow, but their concrete meaning changes at each stage. The report examines each stage in detail, making explicit the key elements and showing how hierarchical governance and flat communication are balanced across the flow.

The appendices include detailed use cases, concrete practices, and interview citations for readers who want to learn directly from the experiences of innovation leaders.

INNOVATION FLOW

STAGE-SPECIFIC ENABLERS



PRACTICAL VALUE

The framework offers a *diagnostic lens* for understanding where innovation breaks down and why. It helps leaders distinguish between problems of silence, fragmentation and adoption without defaulting to generic cultural explanations.

The framework can also be used in *internal interviews and workshops* to surface latent innovation capital, clarify expectations and identify weak transitions. In this way, it supports organizations in activating existing knowledge rather than adding new initiatives.

It can help leaders decide where *to invest resources* and how to run transformation efforts effectively by focusing on the transitions that determine whether ideas progress or stall.



CLOSING INSIGHT

Improving innovation outcomes is not primarily about generating more ideas. It is about enabling ideas to *move, accumulate and settle* inside organizations. The same logic applies to broader transformation efforts, which depend on the same conditions of legitimacy, predictability and connectivity.

We thank all experts and practitioners who generously shared their time and experience for this study. Their openness and practical insight made this research possible.

Special thank to **Eleonor Hedström**, Director, Next Business Lab, at Wärtsilä Energy, **Louis Strydom**, Director of Growth & Development (Europe & Africa) at Wärtsilä Energy, **Reggie Rusan**, Chief Commercial Officer at eSystems Nordic for supporting us in this journey.

INTRODUCTION

We are operating in a period of fast transformation. Technology upgrades move faster than people can adopt them. Inside companies, this shows up as a daily struggle: maintaining efficiency, supporting people, keeping skills developing, and still delivering results without exhausting teams.

In this report, we look at innovation through a social lens — as a process in which people collectively reshape how work is done. Innovation is not abstract or automatic. It is built in everyday interaction and then reinforced, or blocked, through routines, roles, and organizational structures.

We study innovation as a human and organizational process that emerges in communication. People notice problems, try to name them, discuss options, and test solutions. Over time, these ideas meet company structures: priorities, roles, KPIs, governance, and silos. This is where innovation either gains momentum or slows down.

Our central question is:

How do innovation ideas move from “felt but unspoken” to “adopted and operational” inside real organizations?

To address this question, we draw on a social science perspective that treats innovation as a process shaped by interaction, shared expectations, and organizational norms. This allows us to make recurring behavioral patterns visible and to examine, step by step, how management practices, structure, and communication shape innovation flow in practice.

The report is based on conversations with innovation leaders and senior managers in Nordic and European enterprises. We asked them to describe how innovation appears, develops, and survives long enough to become part of everyday work. We analyze their experiences across stages and identify what supports innovation flow — and what disrupts it — at each point.



In this study, innovation is understood as meaningful change in products, processes, business models, and ways of working, as long as that change becomes adopted practice rather than remaining an idea, pilot, or isolated initiative.

This report is addressed to company leaders responsible for innovation, transformation, strategy, operations, and people development.

VALUE FOR LEADERS

Our findings make the innovation process visible. We break it down into stages and elements, show how they relate to each other, and explain how outcomes at one stage shape what becomes possible at the next. Drawing on practices from Nordic industry leaders, the report helps leaders recognize early signals of stalled transformation and see more clearly what is missing or already working in management, structure, culture and communication.



INNOVATION AS A SOCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS: OUR LENS & APPROACH

In this study, we approach innovation as a process that unfolds inside everyday organizational life. Innovation does not move forward on its own. It moves through people: through how problems are noticed, discussed, tested, accepted, or ignored.

Our lens builds on **Berger and Luckmann's**¹ work on the social construction of reality, which explains how new meanings emerge through interaction, stabilize through shared practice, and eventually become taken for granted. Applied to organizations, this helps explain how innovation moves from an individual observation to an accepted way of working.

In this framework, innovation develops through three linked processes:

- **Externalization** — when individuals articulate new ideas or problems, bringing subjective insights into shared discussion.
- **Objectivation** — when these ideas take a more stable and shared form, such as a concept, pilot, or agreed solution that others can engage with.
- **Internalization** — when the new way of working is learned, repeated, and embedded into everyday routines.

Ideas emerge in interaction and gain meaning as others respond to them. At the same time, organizational structures: priorities, roles, decision rights, KPIs and informal norms shape how far ideas can travel and whether they become practice. These structures do not simply enable or block innovation; they actively shape its form and trajectory.

This lens enables us to examine innovation as a social and organizational process, revealing where, how, and why innovation flow breaks inside real companies.

¹Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. A foundational work on how shared meaning becomes institutionalized through social interaction. Reprinted by Penguin Books, 1991.

METHODOLOGY.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA

This study is based on qualitative research and focuses on how innovation is experienced and practiced inside organizations. We use **semi-structured, in-depth interviews** to capture how innovation ideas emerge, move, slow down, or become embedded in everyday work.

Interviewees are innovation leaders and senior practitioners from Nordic and European companies across multiple industries, with organizations ranging in size from approximately 5,000 to 150,000 employees².



Rather than treating innovation as a formal process or a set of tools, we examine it as a lived organizational experience. Interviews allow us to access not only formal descriptions of innovation activities, but also informal practices, workarounds, tensions and decision dynamics that are often invisible in official documentation.

The data consists of **28 in-depth interviews**, conducted between **September and December 2025**. Each interview lasted approximately **30–60 minutes** and followed a shared interview guide, ensuring comparability while leaving space for concrete examples and reflection.

² Data protection and ethics

All interviews were conducted in line with EU data protection requirements (GDPR) and standard research ethics. Participation was voluntary, and all information is treated as confidential. Interview material was coded and analyzed in anonymized form. We do not collect or use sensitive personal data. In cases where respondents provided explicit permission, their name and/or organizational affiliation is referenced. All other findings are reported in anonymized form.

METHODOLOGY.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA



INDUSTRIES REPRESENTED

Industrial manufacturing; energy and marine technology; chemicals and materials; ICT and telecommunications; banking and payments; enterprise software and digital platforms; logistics and infrastructure; construction and urban development; retail and pricing technology; imaging and hardware technology.



ANALYTICAL VALUE OF THE SAMPLE

The combination of multiple industries, significant variation in organizational size, and geographically distributed yet culturally comparable contexts allows the research to identify *recurring patterns of meaning*, shared challenges and structural tensions that shape innovation in large organizations today.



ROLES

Innovation and R&D leaders; heads of strategy and transformation; corporate venturing and ecosystem managers; growth and development directors; product and innovation leads.



GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

Finland, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, with selected input from Central Europe.



3.3. ANALYTICAL APPROACH

We analyzed interview transcripts and notes using qualitative thematic analysis. Our focus was on identifying repeating patterns across organizations, not on individual success stories. With qualitative study methodology, we do not calculate; rather, we explicitly code respondents' narratives for recurring messages and classify them into categories based on social science concepts.

We examined how respondents describe:

- how innovation is defined, valued and legitimized inside the organization,
- how problems and ideas are noticed and articulated in everyday work,
- what role communities and cross-team collaboration play at each stage of the innovation flow,
- how leadership, structure and flat communities are balanced across stages of the innovation flow,
- how innovation becomes embedded in routine practice or gradually fades out.

Analysis was guided by our conceptual lens of externalization, objectivation and internalization, which allowed us to compare experiences across stages of the innovation flow. We paid particular attention to moments where ideas become speakable, where they lose momentum and where everyday routines either support or undermine innovation efforts.



3.4. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study is qualitative in nature and does not aim for statistical representativeness. Its strength lies in depth and comparability, rather than scale.

Findings reflect the experiences of organizations operating in asset-heavy, regulated and technology-intensive environments, primarily in the Nordic and European context. While many patterns are transferable, specific organizational conditions may differ across regions and sectors.

The study focuses on *how innovation happens*, not on measuring innovation performance or outcomes. It captures organizational reality at a moment of ongoing transformation, rather than offering prescriptive models detached from practice.

“

INNOVATION IS NOT A ONE-TIME
THING. IT'S SOMETHING CONTINUOUS.
IT NEEDS TO BE EMBEDDED.

— DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION · INDUSTRIAL
MANUFACTURING · FINLAND

4. WHY INNOVATION IS NEEDED: PURPOSE AS THE STARTING POINT

Across interviews, innovation is described through practical metaphors rather than heroic ones. Respondents speak about innovation as a flow, as a pipeline that can get blocked. Innovation is also described as something that must “live” it can survive through adoption or quietly fade. These metaphors point to innovation as a matter of movement, stability and everyday practice, rather than singular breakthroughs.

Why innovation is needed is articulated in several overlapping ways. Innovation is expected to support growth and economic value, contribute to efficiency and cost protection, and help organizations remain relevant to customers, partners, and employees.

“Innovation is about staying relevant.”

— Head of Innovation · Energy & Infrastructure · Finland

“It’s very important for attracting and retaining specialists that they see the company is developing.”

— Innovation Director · Engineering & Consulting · Denmark

“Customers and partners need to see that development is ongoing.”

— Senior Leader · Global Engineering Firm · Denmark

In many contexts, innovation is understood as incremental improvement: small, continuous changes that protect stability while improving performance.

These meanings matter, because they clearly articulate and communicate why innovation is needed, setting expectations about which initiatives count and where effort should be invested. A shared purpose makes innovation work rational and provides the starting point for initiatives.

A fuller analysis and additional interview excerpts are provided in Appendix 1³.

³ Appendix 1. Why Innovation Is Needed Purpose as the Starting Point



“

HOW DO INNOVATION IDEAS MOVE
FROM “FELT BUT UNSPOKEN” TO
“ADOPTED AND OPERATIONAL” INSIDE
REAL ORGANIZATIONS?

5. THE INNOVATION FLOW:
STAGES AND TRANSITIONS

This section moves from framing to evidence. Drawing on interviews with innovation leaders from Nordic enterprises, we analyze how innovation unfolds in practice, step by step.

We return to the central research question:

How do innovation ideas move from “felt but unspoken” to “adopted and operational” inside real organizations?

Using a social conceptual framework, we translate interview data into a clear, observable pipeline that shows where ideas gain momentum, slow down, or break.

The analysis is structured around three stages of innovation flow:

Stage 1. Ideas become speakable (Externalization)

Stage 2. Ideas take shared, concrete form (Objectivation)

Stage 3. Innovative approach embedder in routine practice (Internalization)

Together, they show how innovation is shaped and what enables or blocks this flow at every stage.

STAGE 1. WHEN INNOVATION IDEAS BECOME SPEAKABLE (EXTERNALIZATION)

This section examines the moment when innovation ideas move from silent awareness into explicit, shareable form. Across interviews, ideas exist for some time as noticing, irritation, curiosity, or concern. What differentiates organizations is not idea generation, but *whether conditions allow ideas to be articulated at all*.

People continuously assess whether it is worth speaking up: whether a problem will be taken seriously, whether raising it is legitimate and whether anything will happen next. Based on cross-interview analysis, three elements shape externalization outcomes: **triggers, enablers, and blockers**.



5. 1. TRIGGERS: WHAT MOVES IDEAS FROM SILENT AWARENESS TO ARTICULATION

Ideas often exist as silent, half-formed insights long before they are voiced. Triggers interrupt routine and force articulation—pushing these ideas into speech. They are not sources of ideas but moments or conditions that make speaking unavoidable.

“Ideas can stay there for a long time if there is no management prioritization.”

— Innovation & R&D Leader · Imaging & Hardware Technology · Finland

The more routine dominates daily work, the fewer triggers occur, making their management a leadership priority.

Four recurring triggers across interviews:

- Internal friction (dominate): Inefficiencies become visible pain points that demand attention.
- External exposure: Customer or market realities expose gaps in current solutions.
- Informal sensemaking: Conversations and communities generate emotional energy around ideas.
- Leadership signals: Explicit cues define when speaking up problems is expected and safe.

The interviews show that managing innovation therefore starts not with idea generation, but with recognizing, legitimizing, and responding to triggers when they appear.

Appendix 2⁴ provides detailed use cases and interview citations illustrating how triggers are experienced and acted upon.

**5.2. ENABLING CONDITIONS: WHEN NEW IDEAS ARTICULATION BECOMES POSSIBLE**

Triggers alone are insufficient, ideas remain silent when enabling conditions are missing. Here we talk more about rules, but not about signals.

“

THE BIGGEST STRUGGLE IS NOT THE IDEA ITSELF, BUT KNOWING WHO NEEDS TO BE CONVINCED.

— INNOVATION & SALES LEADER · TECHNOLOGY & ENTERPRISE SERVICES · FINLAND

5.2.1 CLEAR PIPELINES: LEGITIMATION AND PREDICTABILITY

This factor is closely connected to leadership signals, but differs in its nature. While leadership triggers legitimize *why* speaking up is allowed, clear pipelines legitimize *how* it is done. Pipelines are about *rules*: defined steps, criteria, roles, and decision points that make the path of an idea visible.

When a clear pipeline is in place, raising problems becomes part of expected work rather than a personal initiative. People understand where an idea goes, who evaluates it, and what outcomes are possible. This creates a rational basis for offering innovations: speaking up is no longer an act of individual exposure, but a recognized organizational practice.

⁴ Appendix 2. How Triggers Work in Practice Evidence from Interviews

5.2.2. DEDICATED TIME AND SPACE

Across interviews, we observe that when organizations explicitly allocate time for reflection and discussion, they legitimize innovation work as part of the job rather than as an extra task.

Protected time reduces the pressure and allows problems to be explored before solutions are demanded. In this sense, dedicated time and space perform two functions at once. First, they separate exploration from execution. Second, they signal that incomplete thinking is acceptable before decisions are made.

5.2.3. PEERS & LEADERS RECOGNITION

When articulation is not acknowledged or given feedback, people will adjust their behavior over time. They stop raising issues or limit engagement to what is formally required. Silence accumulates gradually rather than through explicit rejection.

In this sense, recognition performs two functions at once. First, it validates speaking up as meaningful work. Second, it sustains innovation effort beyond the first attempt, keeping the second and third idea alive.

“

INNOVATION WITHOUT RECOGNITION
BECOMES INVISIBLE WORK

— CEO · IT SERVICES · FINLAND

COMMUNITIES ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE
THEY ARE NOT BASED ON HIERARCHY.”

— DIRECTOR, INNOVATION COMMUNITIES · ENGINEERING
& CONSULTING · DENMARK

“

WHEN PEOPLE SPEND TIME IN COMMUNITIES
OR INNOVATION ACTIVITIES, THEY ARE NOT
SOLVING DAY-TO-DAY CUSTOMER PROBLEMS —
AND THEY NEED TO BE ALLOWED TO DO THAT.

— INNOVATION LEADER · ENGINEERING & INFRASTRUCTURE ·
DENMARK

5.2.4. HORIZONTAL COMMUNITIES: A SPACE FOR EARLY ARTICULATION

At this stage, horizontal communities function **as open peer networking spaces** *where problems are discussed before being solved*. They do not require immediate validation or escalation of ideas.

These spaces should exist as a **regular practice** and allow people to test language, relevance, and meaning together before a problem turns into a solution proposal. Responsibility and risk are shared rather than carried individually, and participation remains open across roles and teams.

These communities also act as **containers of innovation memory**, where discussions and emerging ideas remain visible and can return for further development.

In this way, horizontal communities perform two functions. First, they provide a space for early problem articulation. Second, they transform individual concerns into shared organizational issues and *act as a transition mechanism to the next stage*, where problems begin to take the form of ideas that can be reframed and prepared for further validation.

5.3. BLOCKERS: WHY SILENCE REMAINS RATIONAL

The blockers of externalization mirror the enabling conditions, but from the opposite side. They appear where rules are unclear, space is missing, or recognition is absent. Importantly, blockers are not always explicit. More often, they take the form of **weak or missing signals** that would make speaking up reasonable. In these conditions, silence is not resistance or disengagement, but a rational response to uncertainty.

5.3.1. INNOVATION REDUCED TO ROUTINE LOGIC

When innovation is evaluated through the same logic as routine execution, early articulation is filtered out before it can happen.

When efficiency, delivery and short-term performance dominate, incomplete ideas fail routine criteria before they are even voiced. Speaking up becomes difficult to justify when reflection itself is treated as non-essential.

“

INNOVATION IS OFTEN
SEEN AS EXTRA WORK.
PEOPLE DON'T REALLY
HAVE TIME TO THINK

— DIRECTOR · ENERGY & UTILITIES ·
FINLAND



5.3.2. IMPLICIT NORMS AND UNLEGITIMIZED RULE-BREAKING

Even without formal restrictions, informal norms can discourage articulation.

Without explicit legitimation, raising problems can feel like creating trouble or breaking unspoken rules. In these situations, silence is a way to stay aligned with expectations and avoid speaking.

“

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE
OFTEN COMES FROM FEAR
OF EXTRA WORKLOAD OR
DISRUPTION.

— INNOVATION LEAD ·
TELECOMMUNICATIONS · FINLAND

5.4. FINDINGS: WHAT MAKES PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT PROBLEMS

Interviews show that many innovation ideas exist in a **pre-articulated state** long before they are expressed. Individuals notice inefficiencies, capability gaps, coordination failures and missed opportunities that accumulate quietly over time. This latent potential forms what we refer to as **innovation capital** - knowledge and insight that are not yet shared. Difficulty articulating ideas does not indicate a lack of insight. As one respondent notes:

“It requires that you can articulate your idea and explain your idea... and that can be very challenging.”

— Innovation & Strategy Lead · Consumer Goods & Branding · Sweden

Innovation capital often remains silent not because people do not think, but because they are unsure whether talking is *expected*, *useful* or *safe* to express.



Picture 2.

Across interviews, externalization comes down to a decisive question asked at a personal level:

WHY SHOULD I EVEN THINK ABOUT THIS – AND WHY, WHERE, AND WITH WHOM SHOULD I SPEAK UP? WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

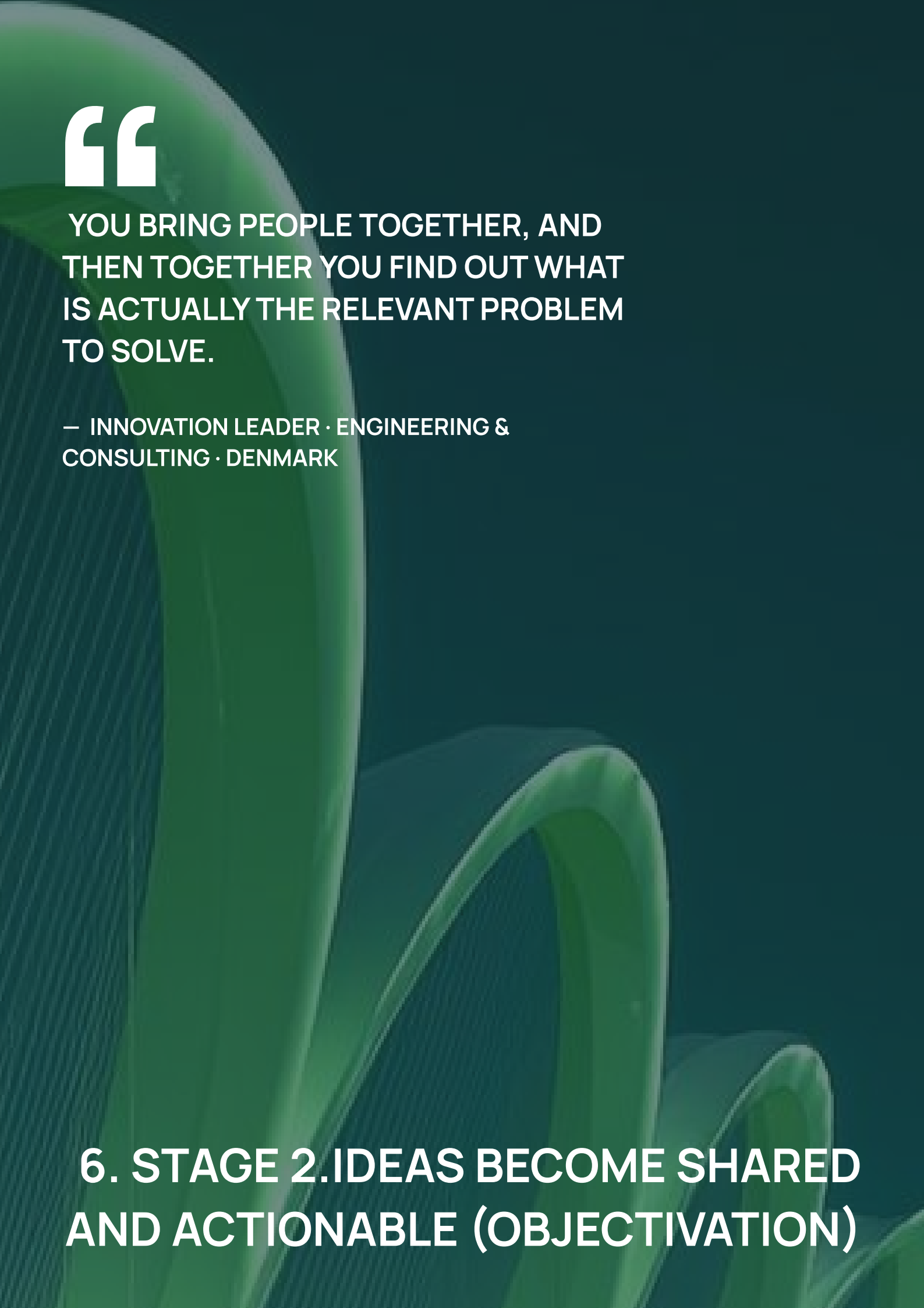
This question is asked by everyone in the organization — from senior leaders to frontline and operational employees. Externalization is not a creative act; it is a judgment call. People decide whether noticing a problem or opportunity is part of their role or merely extra effort with unclear consequences.

Our findings show that speaking up depends less on individual motivation and more on whether four conditions are in place. **Picture 2.**

Leadership enables externalization by legitimizing problem articulation, providing shared community spaces for speaking up, establishing clear rules and predictable consequences, so that noticing and naming issues becomes organized professional work rather than a personal risk.

Externalization, therefore, is not about generating more ideas. It is about *making speaking rational*.

In the next section, we examine what happens once ideas are spoken and why many of them still fail to move forward.



“

YOU BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER, AND
THEN TOGETHER YOU FIND OUT WHAT
IS ACTUALLY THE RELEVANT PROBLEM
TO SOLVE.

— INNOVATION LEADER · ENGINEERING &
CONSULTING · DENMARK

6. STAGE 2. IDEAS BECOME SHARED
AND ACTIONABLE (OBJECTIVATION)

TRANSITIONAL SENSEMAKING IN PRACTICE

Once ideas are spoken, the challenge is whether they become shared and recognizable for others. Objectivation is the stage where ideas should be discussed, reframed and stabilized as shared ownership or die.

People work around it and invest attention in it. These moments can look like miracles. The data shows they follow recurring patterns of collective sensemaking. Interviewees consistently describe this as the moment where innovation *“either starts to exist or disappears.”*

“

YOU CAN SAY THE IDEA OUT LOUD, BUT UNTIL OTHERS CAN WORK WITH IT, IT’S NOT REALLY THERE.

— INNOVATION LEAD · INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTURING · GERMANY

At that stage idea relevance is not established through formal approval, but through engagement: others reference the idea, test it against their context. When this happens, the idea becomes an object: a concept, solution outline, pilot, or prototype that can move forward.

“

AT SOME POINT, PEOPLE START TALKING ABOUT IT AS SOMETHING REAL, NOT JUST SOMEONE’S THOUGHT.

— STRATEGY & INNOVATION MANAGER · ENERGY · FINLAND

6.1. COMMUNICATION SPACE AS THE CRUCIAL ENABLING CONDITION⁵

At this stage, the process typically requires **small autonomous groups** where synchronous dialogue is possible.

In practice, ideas survive and develop only when there is a dedicated communication space where they can move through key transitions: from a personal issue to a shared and relevant idea, from individual ownership to shared ownership, and from discussion to a first pilot or concrete step.

In this communication space, ideas are not yet expected to perform. They are allowed to be questioned, challenged and reframed before being absorbed into formal structures.

Several respondents describe it as a place where ideas can “live” before they are asked to deliver results.

Through discussion, ideas move from individual ownership to shared ownership, and from initial articulation to a first concrete step, such as a concept or pilot. Interviewees emphasize that this requires **synchronized dialogue, protected time and a space** separate from routine delivery work.

It is a socially sanctioned and psychologically safe setting where people step out of routine task execution and engage in shared sensemaking.

Across interviews, this space has recurring characteristics. It is typically **separate from daily operations**, involves **small, non-hierarchical groups** and relies on **synchronous dialogue** where feedback loops are immediate. At this stage, groups are typically granted a **high degree of autonomy**. Face-to-face interaction is often preferred, not because it is symbolic, but because it allows meaning to stabilize in real time through reaction, clarification, and adjustment.

These conditions are most often provided by communities or similar cross-functional groups, which allow ideas to be discussed, challenged and stabilized before they are expected to perform.

“

YOU NEED A SPACE WHERE YOU CAN TALK THINGS THROUGH PROPERLY, WITHOUT IMMEDIATELY DECIDING OR JUDGING

— INNOVATION LEADER · ENGINEERING & CONSULTING · DENMARK

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE ROOM. IT'S ABOUT HAVING REAL CONVERSATIONS WHERE PEOPLE CAN REACT IMMEDIATELY.

— DIRECTOR, GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT · ENERGY & INDUSTRIAL SYSTEMS · NETHERLANDS

YOU NEED A SPACE WHERE PEOPLE CAN ACTUALLY TALK THINGS THROUGH BEFORE ANYTHING IS DECIDED.

— INNOVATION LEAD · ENERGY & UTILITIES · FINLAND



⁵ Appendix 3 provides additional interview citations and practical examples of how leaders describe and organize these spaces in practice.

6.2. FROM DISCUSSION TO ACTION PLANS: KEY TRANSITIONS IN COMMUNITY WORK

In this section, we focus on *transitions* - the moments where ideas change status: from personal insight to shared problem, from individual ownership to collective responsibility and from consensus to concrete action. These transitions are where innovation either gains momentum or stalls.

This breakdown explicit where innovation flow actually moves and where targeted intervention can help ideas progress.

6.2.1 TRANSITION 1. FROM IDEA TO SOLUTION FRAMING

The first critical transition of objectivation occurs when an idea shifts from a personal observation to a shared problem-solution framing. Ideas survive when they are anchored to problems that others already recognize as relevant.

This transition happens through dialogue: questioning, reframing, and testing interpretations together. What starts as “my idea” becomes “a problem we might need to solve.”



“

YOU BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER, AND THEN TOGETHER YOU FIND OUT WHAT IS ACTUALLY THE RELEVANT PROBLEM TO SOLVE.

— INNOVATION LEADER · ENGINEERING & CONSULTING · DENMARK

“

OFTEN THE FIRST IDEA IS NOT THE SOLUTION - IT'S JUST A SIGNAL THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG.

— PRODUCT & INNOVATION MANAGER · DIGITAL SERVICES · FINLAND



Ideas begin to move when they are reframed as shared problems rather than individual insights. Interview data shows that without this anchoring, ideas remain abstract or appear as novelty. With it, they become intelligible and discussable across roles.

6.2.2. TRANSITION 2: FROM INDIVIDUAL TO SHARED OWNERSHIP

Objectivation continues when ideas detach from their originators and become something others can carry. This is a social shift in ownership, not a formal handover.

Across interviews, respondents emphasize that ideas rarely survive when responsibility remains with a single individual. Shared ownership distributes both meaning and risk.

“

THE MOST IMPACTFUL PART IS THE NETWORK – IT’S GUIDANCE, IT’S TALKING, IT’S OTHERS TAKING THE IDEA FURTHER.

– OPEN INNOVATION LEAD · INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION · FINLAND

ONCE MORE PEOPLE START USING THE SAME LANGUAGE, THE IDEA BECOMES REAL.

– INNOVATION DIRECTOR · ENGINEERING & INFRASTRUCTURE · DENMARK

Shared ownership is visible when others start referring to the idea, adapting it or integrating it into their own work. At this point, the idea is no longer dependent on one person’s energy – it becomes socially real when others start carrying them.

6.2.3. TRANSITION 3: FROM TALK TO FIRST CONCRETE STEP

The final transition of objectivation occurs when discussion leads to a first tangible step: a pilot, prototype, experiment, or defined project. Importantly, this does not require full approval or scale.

Across interviews, pilots are described less as delivery mechanisms and more as social proof — a signal that the idea is legitimate enough to exist in practice.

“

AT SOME POINT, YOU NEED TO LET PEOPLE TRY. OTHERWISE IT STAYS THEORETICAL.

– INNOVATION & STRATEGY LEAD · TELECOMMUNICATIONS · FINLAND

PILOTS ARE NOT ABOUT SUCCESS. THEY ARE ABOUT MAKING THE IDEA REAL ENOUGH TO LEARN.

– HEAD OF INNOVATION · ENERGY & UTILITIES · FINLAND

Objectivation is completed when ideas are allowed to exist in practice, even temporarily. This step marks the end of objectivation: the idea now behaves like a solution others can interact with.

6.3. WHY EARLY EVALUATION BREAKS INNOVATION

Our respondents consistently describe early evaluation as one of the main reasons articulated ideas fail to move forward. When ideas are immediately assessed through delivery metrics, efficiency logic or investment criteria, they are judged before their meaning has stabilized.

At this stage, ideas are still ambiguous. They require clarification, reframing and shared interpretation. Premature evaluation interrupts this process by forcing ideas to perform before they are understood.

Objectivation is not about deciding. It is about stabilizing meaning so that decisions can later be made on something real. Evaluation becomes productive only after ideas have taken a shared, recognizable form.

“

IF YOU GO TOO FAST TO DECISION-
MAKING, YOU KILL HALF OF THE IDEAS
BEFORE THEY EVEN MAKE SENSE.

— INNOVATION LEAD · INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTURING
· FINLAND

PEOPLE START DEFENDING OR REJECTING
IDEAS INSTEAD OF UNDERSTANDING WHAT
PROBLEM THEY ACTUALLY SOLVE

— STRATEGY & TRANSFORMATION LEAD · ENERGY ·
FINLAND



6.4. ROLE OF DIGITAL TOOLS IN SUSTAINING IDEAS

Interviewees emphasize that digital tools play a supportive but secondary role. They help **stabilize idea after meaning has begun to form** through coordination, visibility, follow-up and accumulation of innovation memory. Used too early, tools fragment discussion. Used at the right moment, they help ideas persist.

AI-agents may also assist early reframing and exploration, for example through structured brainstorming.

Digital tools support innovation memory by making discussions, decisions and iterations traceable and accessible. This helps ideas persist across teams and over time, supporting their transition toward piloting and operational testing.

“

IF EVERYTHING GOES STRAIGHT
INTO TOOLS, YOU LOSE THE
DISCUSSION.

—INNOVATION MANAGER · ICT & DIGITAL
PLATFORMS · FINLAND

6.4.1 WHAT MAKES IDEAS SURVIVE AND WHAT KILLS THEM

This section summarizes the conditions that determine whether ideas develop or quietly disappear. Interview evidence shows that ideas survive when there is a **repeatable community space** where people can regularly share problems and ideas. These communities are small, non-hierarchical and autonomous, enabling synchronized dialogue and collective validation.

Ideas survive when they can **return for further discussion through feedback loops** and be reframed based on input from others. Repetition and feedback allow meaning to **stabilize** and ownership to shift from individuals to a group. Digital tools support this by documenting discussions, enabling follow-up and accumulating **innovation memory**, as well as preparing solutions for the next step, such as piloting and embedding.

FOSTERING COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING



Picture 3.

This sensemaking work requires distance from immediate delivery pressure and early evaluation. Leadership enables this by legitimizing participation, allocating time and making outcomes predictable. When these conditions are in place, ownership shifts from individuals to a group that believes the idea works.

Ideas are rarely rejected explicitly.

Objectivation fails through fragmentation and forgetting. When meaning, ownership or memory are not stabilized at this stage, later failures appear as handover or adoption problems.

In the next stage, Internalization, we examine how stabilized ideas either become routine practice or stall during adoption and handover.



MOST IDEAS DON'T DIE. THEY JUST DISAPPEAR.

—DIRECTOR · GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT ·
ENERGY & INDUSTRIAL SYSTEMS ·
NETHERLANDS

⁶ Additional interview excerpts illustrating how these barriers appear in practice are provided in Appendix 2

“

WHEN A SOLUTION IS SHARED
THROUGH THE COMMUNITY AND USED
IN ANOTHER LOCATION, PEOPLE
OFTEN COME BACK WITH
IMPROVEMENTS OR VARIATIONS
BASED ON THEIR CONTEXT

— GROUP VICE PRESIDENT • INDUSTRIAL
AUTOMATION • FINLAND

7. STAGE 3. MANAGING
INNOVATION EMBEDDING &
ADOPTION. (INTERNALIZATION)

Even well-formed ideas often fail at the final step: becoming routine rather than remaining exceptional.

A validated innovation stops being a pilot or special initiative and becomes part of how the organization operates. Internalization is the point where ideas are repeated, learned and embedded into everyday routines until they become regular practice rather than managed change.

From a business perspective, this is where innovation meets organizational structure and either delivers value or fades. Importantly, internalization does not start at handover: interview evidence shows that adoption failures often originate earlier, when ownership, pipelines, or shared understanding are not prepared in previous stages.



7.1. HOW INNOVATION BECOMES PRACTICE: STRUCTURE × COMMUNICATION

Across interviews, we observe that **internalization is not a single process but the outcome of interaction between two constitutive elements: structure and communication**. Innovations become embedded in everyday work only when both elements are present and aligned. We look at this transition through a sociological lens, where internalization means habituation: the innovation is repeated, learned, and embedded in everyday routines until it becomes regular practice rather than a consciously managed change.

Structural components are more **hierarchical** and require clear leadership signals, while communication flows are **non-hierarchical**, moving across departments and countries. This creates a need for specific agility in managing innovation, where both flows must operate in parallel rather than sequentially.

One respondent describes innovation management as **orchestration**: a coordinating hub that guides, aligns, and manages the innovation pipeline across departments—without owning or executing all innovation itself:

“

For analytical purposes, we therefore systematize structure and communication as distinct but interdependent dimensions, and highlight the factors our respondents identify as crucial for successfully embedding innovations.

FOR INNOVATION TO WORK IN ANY ORGANIZATION, A NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CONDITION IS HAVING A CENTRAL INNOVATION TEAM THAT ORCHESTRATES THE PROCESS. WITHOUT CENTRAL ORCHESTRATION—CLEAR RULES, CRITERIA, AND PATHWAYS—INNOVATION INITIATIVES DON'T WORK.

— ENTERPRISE PRODUCT & TRANSFORMATION LEADER •
IT SERVICES • NETHERLANDS

7.2. STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS THAT ENABLE EMBEDDING & ADOPTION

These elements show that internalization is enabled when organizations build **structures that make adoption legitimate, owned, and decidable**. Pipelines clarify intent, ownership ensures continuity, and prioritization connects innovation to business reality.

“

AS LONG AS SOMETHING IS NOT INTEGRATED INTO EXISTING PROCESSES, IT'S SEEN AS A TRIAL. THE MOMENT IT IS PREPARED FOR SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE, PEOPLE UNDERSTAND IT'S SERIOUS.

— INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS LEADER • IMAGING & PRINTING • DENMARK

“

WHEN PEOPLE SEE THAT NEW APPROACHES ARE ACTUALLY USED IN REAL PROJECTS, NOT JUST DISCUSSED, IT CHANGES HOW SERIOUSLY THEY TAKE INNOVATION.

— URBAN DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR • CONSTRUCTION & INFRASTRUCTURE • FINLAND

“

WHEN DEVELOPMENT ENDS, SOMEONE IN OPERATIONS MUST OWN IT — MAINTENANCE, IMPROVEMENT, PERFORMANCE. OTHERWISE, IT DISAPPEARS.

— GROUP VICE PRESIDENT • INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION • FINLAND

7.2.1 LEGITIMATION THROUGH PIPELINES AND COMMON RULES

Clear innovation pipelines define common rules, make the future of an idea predictable and reduce personal risk. A key structural signal is **integration into operational systems**, which marks the transition from experimentation to routine work.

7.2.2. OWNERSHIP ASSIGNMENT

Embedment requires explicit responsibility for adoption, maintenance and performance once innovation leaves R&D or pilot teams. Ownership must be operational rather than symbolic.

7.2.3. DECISION-MAKING AND PRIORITIZATION

Respondents describe formal decision points where organizations determine whether to invest or stop, how innovations tie to business objectives, and who carries them forward operationally. Pipeline management is also described as a **protective governance mechanism**, balancing innovation with operational stability.

“

INNOVATION STARTS VERY OPENLY, BUT IT CANNOT STAY OPEN ALL THE WAY. AS IDEAS MOVE FORWARD, EXPECTATIONS CHANGE. FEWER IDEAS CONTINUE, AND THOSE THAT DO REQUIRE CLEARER OWNERSHIP AND STRONGER BUSINESS JUSTIFICATION.

— INNOVATION & DEVELOPMENT LEAD • INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTURING • FINLAND

“

NOT EVERYTHING SHOULD MOVE FORWARD. PART OF MANAGING INNOVATION IS DECIDING WHAT SHOULD NEVER REACH CORE SYSTEMS. OTHERWISE, YOU OVERLOAD THE ORGANIZATION

— BANKING INNOVATION LEAD • FINANCIAL SOFTWARE & BANKING • NORDIC

7.3. COMMUNICATION: MAKING INNOVATION SHARED AND HABITUAL

Unlike structural elements, communication relies on **horizontal** channels that connect departments, project teams and countries. Its role is critical for **habituation**: turning innovation into shared knowledge, repeated practice and eventually a new organizational norm. Communication refers to how knowledge circulates across organizational boundaries.



A LOT OF ALIGNMENT HAPPENS THROUGH DIRECT CHATS BETWEEN PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT UNITS. IT'S OFTEN FASTER AND MORE EFFECTIVE THAN FORMAL MEETINGS

— BANKING INNOVATION LEAD • FINANCIAL SOFTWARE & BANKING • SWEDEN



EXPERTS ACROSS DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS AND COUNTRIES ARE CONNECTED THROUGH INTERNAL FORUMS AND COMMUNITIES, WHERE THEY SHARE EXPERIENCES AND SOLUTIONS RELATED TO PRODUCTS AND PROCESSES. THIS IS NOT A SEPARATE INNOVATION ACTIVITY, BUT PART OF HOW PEOPLE DO THEIR WORK

— INNOVATION & DEVELOPMENT LEAD • INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTURING • FINLAND

At this stage, these structures function as **cross-functional coordination groups**.

Across interviews, we observe that companies rely on **horizontal communities** as the primary carriers of communication. These communities take multiple forms, including **cross-functional expert networks, communities of practice, and practice-based groups**, supported by **internal digital platforms, global collaboration tools**, and **informal chats**. Importantly, communication is embedded in everyday work rather than positioned as a separate innovation activity.

Respondents emphasize that knowledge travels most effectively when shared through **real use cases** rather than abstract concepts. Practical examples allow teams in different units and locations to recognize relevance, adapt solutions locally, and apply them without additional translation. Beyond dissemination, communication also performs a **feedback function**.



QUESTIONS, PARTIAL SOLUTIONS, AND LEARNINGS ARE SHARED OPENLY ON INTERNAL PLATFORMS, SO TEAMS IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS CAN REUSE AND BUILD ON THEM RATHER THAN WORKING IN ISOLATION

— DIGITAL INNOVATION LEADER • TELECOMMUNICATIONS • FINLAND



WHEN A SOLUTION IS SHARED THROUGH THE COMMUNITY AND USED IN ANOTHER LOCATION, PEOPLE OFTEN COME BACK WITH IMPROVEMENTS OR VARIATIONS BASED ON THEIR CONTEXT

— GROUP VICE PRESIDENT • INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION • FINLAND



CONTINUOUS EXCHANGE BETWEEN USE, ADAPTATION, AND IMPROVEMENT CREATES FEEDBACK LOOPS THAT SUSTAIN INNOVATION OVER TIME.

— DIGITAL INNOVATION LEADER • TELECOMMUNICATIONS • FINLAND

Through these loops, organizations accumulate innovation memory: a growing repository of experiences, solutions, and lessons learned that functions as a living bank of ideas.

Interview evidence shows that communication does more than disseminate knowledge: it enables feedback loops in which feedback from use, adaptation, and local variation is shared back into communities and platforms. Through this continuous exchange, organizations build cumulative learning and innovation memory rather than relying on one-off transfers.

Taken together, communication enables internalization by making innovation **visible, repeatable, and collectively owned**. While structure allows organizations to act on knowledge, communication ensures that knowledge is shared, remembered, and normalized across boundaries.

“

WHEN SOMETHING IS USED IN A PROJECT, FEEDBACK COMES IMMEDIATELY: WHAT WORKED, WHAT DIDN'T. AND THAT LEARNING IS THEN SHARED AND REUSED IN THE NEXT PROJECTS

— INNOVATION PARTNERSHIPS LEAD • ENERGY • FINLAND

OVER TIME, EXAMPLES AND LESSONS ACCUMULATE. PEOPLE DON'T START FROM ZERO EVERY TIME — THEY BUILD ON WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN TRIED

— INNOVATION STRATEGY LEAD • CHEMICALS & MATERIALS • FINLAND



7.4. WHERE INNOVATION EMBEDDING & ADOPTION BREAKS DOWN

Across interviews, respondents rarely describe embedding as a formal “process.” Instead, they describe practical governance problems that appear once a pilot is validated and must live inside the organization.

We observe three recurring themes: ownership, pipeline management and KPI alignment, and communication gaps caused by organizational silos.

7.4.1. OWNERSHIP: “WHEN IT’S NOT R&D ANYMORE”

The most frequently mentioned problem in embedding innovation is loss of ownership at handover.

That’s how people describe the moment, when innovation leaves protected structures:

“

THEN IT GOES BACK TO THE BUSINESS UNITS... AND THAT’S USUALLY WHERE THINGS SLOW DOWN.

—INNOVATION PARTNERSHIPS LEAD • ENERGY • FINLAND

Similarly, they frame ownership as a structural, not motivational, issue:

“

IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY, WHO NEEDS TO BE CONVINCED, AND WHAT IS ACTUALLY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

— ENTERPRISE INNOVATION ADVISOR • TECHNOLOGY / ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE • FINLAND

PEOPLE ARE VERY GOOD AT THEIR OWN ROLES, BUT INNOVATION USUALLY SITS BETWEEN FUNCTIONS — AND THAT SPACE IS NOT OWNED BY ANYONE

— PEOPLE & BUSINESS DEVELOPER • FINANCIAL SERVICES • FINLAND

structurally reassigned after piloting. When ownership remains ambiguous, adoption stalls: innovation teams step back, business units inherit something they did not initiate, and no one clearly owns the next operational step.



7.4.2. PIPELINE MANAGEMENT: PREDICTING THE LIFE OF AN IDEA

This pattern runs across all stages of the innovation flow. Respondents consistently emphasize that people engage in innovation only when expectations are clear, rules are known, and outcomes are predictable. When what happens next is uncertain, participation declines — regardless of role or motivation.

That's how people repeatedly returns to this point:

“If innovation is not embedded in the frontline, it either becomes ignored or fizzles out.”

— **Director, Growth & Development • Energy & Industrial Systems • Finland / Global**

From another angle, pipelines matter culturally:

“At some point it should just be part of operations, otherwise people stop going there.”

— **Former Innovation Director • Engineering & Consultancy • Denmark**

Many respondents indirectly point to the same mechanism: **what gets measured gets embedded**. Pilots without clear prioritization undermine adoption, while innovation overload creates competition for attention and ownership.

“People already have their KPIs. Innovation is always something extra.”

— **Enterprise Innovation Advisor • Technology & Enterprise Software • Finland**

Without KPI translation, innovation remains morally supported but operationally optional.

Crucially, this is linked to **missing pipelines**: unclear stages after piloting, no visible decision points, and no operational landing zone. Clear pipelines act as a legitimization signal — reducing personal risk and translating innovation from “extra work” into expected work. This explains why many “successful pilots” never become routine practice.

7.4.3. SILOS BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS: INNOVATION AS “SOMEONE ELSE’S JOB”

Departmental silos appear in interviews not as hostility, but as misaligned logics.

That’s how people describes structural separation across divisions:

“It’s still happening in silos... there are synergies, but not too much happening between divisions.”
— Innovation Partnerships Lead • Energy • Finland

Empirically, silos form because innovation units operate under different rules, while business units are measured on delivery and KPIs, leaving no shared accountability at the interface. As a result, silos are not resolved by communication alone: knowledge may flow across units, but responsibility and decision-making do not.

“

SOMETIMES YOU END UP WITH INNOVATION DEPARTMENTS THAT PEOPLE QUITE OFTEN IGNORE... BECAUSE IT’S LIKE, ‘THOSE ARE THE FLAKY GUYS WITH INTERESTING IDEAS’.

— DIRECTOR, GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT • ENERGY & INDUSTRIAL SYSTEMS • FINLAND & GLOBAL

INFORMATION MOVES QUITE WELL, BUT DECISIONS ARE STILL MADE WITHIN UNITS. THAT’S WHERE THINGS SLOW DOWN

— DIGITAL INNOVATION LEADER • TELECOMMUNICATIONS • FINLAND



7.5. FINDINGS: HOW INNOVATION GETS EMBEDDED

Across interviews, a consistent pattern emerges: **embedding innovation is not about creativity or the number of pilots, but about integration.** Successful internalization happens when organizations deliberately combine **structural hierarchy** with **horizontal communication**.

On the **structural side**, hierarchy plays a critical role in **legitimation**. Clear innovation pipelines, decision rules, and ownership signal that ideas can move from pilot to operations. This reduces personal risk, clarifies priorities, and turns innovation from voluntary effort into expected work. Where such structure is present, organizations are able to respond to knowledge rather than merely acknowledge it.

On the **communication side**, organizations create **space and time for knowledge to circulate**. Cross-functional and cross-country communities, supported by internal platforms and informal channels, enable solutions to travel beyond local teams. These horizontal communication flows support **cross-boundary exchange, feedback loops and recognition**, allowing practices to be adapted, reused, and improved over time. *Picture 4.*

Critically, communication does more than spread ideas: it **builds innovation memory**. Through repeated sharing of use cases, feedback from real work and accumulated experience, organizations create a collective repository of what works — and why.



Picture 4.

“

HOW DOES INNOVATION ACTUALLY
MOVE INSIDE LARGE ORGANIZATIONS,
AND WHERE DOES IT BREAK?

8. CONCLUSION: HOW
INNOVATION MOVES – AND
WHAT MAKES IT STICK

FINDINGS: INNOVATION SUCCEEDS OR FAILS AT TRANSITIONS

Our guiding question was:

How does innovation actually move inside large organizations, and where does it break?

Interviews with innovation leaders across industries show that innovation rarely fails because organizations lack ideas or technology. It fails because ideas do not move. Breakdowns occur mainly at transitions: between articulation and alignment, alignment and piloting, and piloting and operational embedding.

In practice, innovation follows three recurring stages. Ideas first emerge with individuals and must become speakable (Externalization). They then need to be shared, aligned and stabilized into concepts or pilots (Objectivation). Finally, validated solutions must be embedded into everyday operations (Internalization). Failure at any transition stops innovation, regardless of idea quality.

Across cases, we observed that innovation functions as a flow. Problems in early stages reappear later as fragmentation, stalled pilots, or adoption failures. Understanding innovation as a staged flow makes it possible to diagnose failures precisely instead of relying on generic cultural or process explanations.



8.1. HOW INNOVATION IS ENABLED: CROSS-CUTTING PATTERNS

Across all three stages, the same systemic requirements recur.

LEGITIMACY UNLOCKS ENGAGEMENT.

People engage in innovation only when innovation-related actions are recognized as real work, not as extra work or informal personal initiative. Legitimacy answers a practical employee question: *“Am I expected to do this, and will it be taken seriously?”* It is established through visible rules: authorization to speak, protected time for sensemaking and formal reassignment of ownership.



PREDICTABILITY MAKES PARTICIPATION RATIONAL.

Innovation is inherently uncertain, so people constantly assess whether effort is justified by asking what happens next. When consequences are unclear, participation drops. Predictability emerges when pipelines, transitions, ownership, and decision points are explicit and consistent.

CONNECTIVITY ENABLES TRANSITIONS AND FLOW.

Most failures occur at handovers between teams, functions, or units. Organizations address this through different forms of horizontal collaboration across the innovation flow. **Open peer communities** allow employees to raise issues and articulate early ideas. **Small autonomous groups** provide a space for synchronous dialogue where ideas are discussed, reframed, and stabilized. **Cross-functional coordination groups** connect departments when solutions move toward implementation and operational adoption.



Across stages, these collaborative structures also act as **containers of innovation memory**, retaining learning from discussions, pilots and iterations so ideas remain visible across time and organizational transitions.

From a leadership perspective, enabling innovation is best described as *orchestration*, as one of our experts put it. Leadership work changes across the flow and focuses on coordinating people, timing, decision points and handovers rather than directing ideas or owning solutions.

8.2. WHAT DIFFERS BY STAGE: STAGE-SPECIFIC LOGIC

Although the same conditions recur, their expression differs by stage. Leaders orchestrate innovation by balancing management mechanisms with communication structures that allow ideas to move across the organization. This section highlights practical signals leaders can notice at each stage of the innovation flow to assess whether this balance is working and where it is breaking down.

Across the flow, three dominant risks appear:

- Silence in Externalization
- Fragmentation in Objectivation
- Drop-off in Internalization



8.2.1. MAKING IDEAS SPEAKABLE. EXTERNALIZATION

The dominant risk is silence. Problems are noticed but not articulated when speaking up feels optional or disconnected from daily work. Innovation begins when leadership legitimizes articulation and provides clear entry points. Communicative enablers: non-hierarchical peer networks and regular community meeting, lower the threshold for speaking and enable noticing to turn into expression.

ORGANIZATIONAL ENABLERS (MAKING IDEAS SPEAKABLE)	COMMUNICATIVE ENABLERS (CREATING TIME & SAFE SPACE)
LEADERSHIP EXPLICITLY LEGITIMIZES SPEAKING UP ABOUT PROBLEMS	NON-HIERARCHICAL PEER NETWORKS
DEDICATED TIME AND SPACE OUTSIDE DELIVERY PRESSURE	TRUST-BASED PEER INTERACTION
CLEAR PIPELINE FOR WHAT FOLLOWS AFTER ARTICULATION	REGULAR MOMENTS FOR SHARING PROBLEMS AND OBSERVATIONS

Table 1. Critical Enablers for Making Ideas Speakable

8.2.2. MAKING IDEAS SHARED AND CONCRETE. OBJECTIVATION

The dominant risk is fragmentation. Ideas are discussed but never stabilize into shared concepts, pilots or decisions. Communities perform collective sensemaking and validation. Light-weight organizational enablers: protected experimentation spaces, repetition and innovation memory maintain continuity. Leadership's role is to orchestrate spaces where ideas can live before being forced to perform.

ORGANIZATIONAL ENABLERS (STABILIZING IDEAS)	COMMUNICATIVE ENABLERS (MEANING-MAKING)
PROTECTED EXPERIMENTATION SPACE SEPARATED FROM EARLY EVALUATION	SYNCHRONIZED DIALOGUE FOR VALIDATION AND COLLECTIVE SENSEMAKING IN SMALL GROUPS
VISIBLE PIPELINE AND CLEAR NEXT STEPS AFTER DISCUSSION	FOLLOW-UP LOOPS THAT ENABLE REPETITION AND CONTINUITY
GOVERNANCE OF REPETITION AND CONTINUITY	FLAT, CROSS-FUNCTIONAL PARTICIPATION ACROSS ROLES
SHARED DIGITAL SPACES TO RETAIN EMERGING SOLUTIONS	SHARED OWNERSHIP THROUGH ONGOING DISCUSSION

Table 2. Critical Enablers for Making Ideas Shared and Stabilized

8.2.3. MAKING IDEAS STICK. INTERNALIZATION

The dominant risk is drop-off after pilots. Solutions exist, but ownership is not reassigned and ideas do not enter normal operations. Organizational enablers dominate at this stage: pipelines beyond pilots, explicit ownership transfer, decision points to invest or scale and integration into operational systems and KPIs. Communicative enablers sustain learning through use cases, feedback loops and recognition. When these conditions are met, innovation becomes habitual and no longer labeled as innovation.

ORGANIZATIONAL ENABLERS (EMBEDDING)	COMMUNICATIVE ENABLERS (SUSTAINING USE)
CLEAR INNOVATION PIPELINE BEYOND PILOTS	HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION ACROSS DEPARTMENTS AND COUNTRIES
EXPLICIT TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP TO OPERATIONS OR BUSINESS UNITS	REAL USE-CASES SHARING
DEFINED DECISION POINTS: INVEST / STOP / SCALE	FEEDBACK LOOPS
ALIGNMENT WITH BUSINESS KPIS AND OBJECTIVES	RECOGNITION OF CONTRIBUTIONS DURING ADOPTION
INTEGRATION INTO OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES	ACCUMULATION AND SHARING OF INNOVATION MEMORY

Table 3. Critical Enablers for Making Ideas Stick

8.3. PRACTICAL VALUE OF THE FRAMEWORK

This framework provides practical value in three ways.

First, it diagnoses where innovation breaks. Organizations can identify whether problems stem from silence, fragmentation, or adoption failure and intervene at the right stage.

Second, it guides leadership focus. It clarifies what must be legitimized, structured or reassigned at each stage instead of applying one leadership approach everywhere.

Third, it offers a shared language for internal work. Using the three stages in interviews and workshops helps surface latent knowledge, reveal hidden bottlenecks and align expectations across teams.

In this way, the framework activates *existing innovation capital* rather than requiring new initiatives and offers a practical entry point for internal transformation and innovation conversations.

8.4. FINAL CONCLUSION AND FORWARD QUESTION

Innovation does not fail because people lack ideas. It fails when organizations do not manage how ideas move.

Managing innovation flow, stage by stage, is therefore a core leadership task. The same logic applies to broader transformation efforts, which also depend on articulation, alignment, and embedding. Managing this flow means building legitimacy, predictability, and connectivity at each stage.

***The question to take forward is:
What kind of community can sustain innovation
and transformation in your organization, and how
should leadership enable it to function across
stages?***

APPENDIX 1. WHY INNOVATION IS NEEDED: PURPOSE AS THE STARTING POINT

Across interviews, innovation is described through practical metaphors rather than heroic ones. Respondents speak about innovation as a flow, as a pipeline that can get blocked. Innovation is also described as something that must “live” it can survive through adoption or quietly fade. These metaphors point to innovation as a matter of movement, stability and everyday practice, rather than singular breakthroughs.

1. INNOVATION AS FLOW, NOT EVENT

Interviewees describe innovation as a continuous process that must be sustained over time and embedded into daily operations.

“Innovation is not a one-time thing. It’s something continuous. It needs to be embedded.”
— Director of Innovation · Industrial Manufacturing · Finland

“Innovations are needed every day. I’m a big fan of continuous improvement: small steps today, small steps tomorrow.”
— Senior R&D Manager · Materials & Process Industry · Finland

Innovation is experienced as infrastructure rather than inspiration. It needs continuity, visibility, and connection to daily work.

2. INNOVATION AS GROWTH AND ECONOMIC VALUE

For many respondents, innovation is tightly linked to growth and tangible outcomes. Without visible economic impact, innovation quickly loses legitimacy.

“Innovation without financial or tangible impact is just ideas.”
— Commercial Director · Technology & B2B Services · Finland

“We innovate to create impact. Innovation itself does not create impact, but implementation does.”
— CEO · IT & Digital Services · Finland

“There is a huge demand now, and innovation is a key part of our growth.”
— Senior Manager · New Business · Energy Sector · Finland

Innovation is seen as meaningful when it contributes to revenue, new business or strategic positioning.

3. INNOVATION AS EFFICIENCY AND COST PROTECTION

In industrial and operations-heavy contexts, innovation is often understood as improving existing systems, not disrupting them.

“Innovation can simply be doing a job more easily than before.”
— Technology Development Manager · Logistics & Infrastructure · Finland

"It can be resource efficiency, energy efficiency, cost efficiency: a better way of doing the same thing."

— Senior Strategy Manager · Energy & Utilities · Finland

Incremental change is described as both realistic and socially acceptable.

"Most innovation is incremental. You improve one corner today, another tomorrow."

— R&D Lead · Industrial Manufacturing · Finland

For many organizations, innovation is a way to protect stability while gradually improving performance.

4. INNOVATION AS COMPETITIVE RELEVANCE AND SIGNAL

Beyond economic and operational outcomes, innovation also functions as a signal to partners, employees and the market.

"Innovation is about staying relevant."

— Head of Innovation · Energy & Infrastructure · Finland

"It's very important for attracting and retaining specialists that they see the company is developing."

— Innovation Director · Engineering & Consulting · Denmark

"Customers and partners need to see that development is ongoing."

— Senior Leader · Global Engineering Firm · Denmark

Innovation also operates as symbolic capital, reinforcing trust and long-term relevance by signaling seriousness and future orientation.

5. WHAT THIS IMPLIES BEFORE MANAGING INNOVATION

Innovation is understood through several overlapping meanings: as flow, as growth, as efficiency and as competitive relevance. These meanings shape how innovation is supported, prioritized and evaluated in practice.

Growth and efficiency frames can help legitimize investment, scaling and adoption.

Competitive relevance, in turn, may legitimize early articulation and experimentation, when outcomes are still uncertain.

"A clear pipeline and criteria are needed so people know where ideas go."

— Founder · Industrial Technology · Finland

A clearly articulated and shared understanding of the purpose of innovation functions as an internal signal that enables innovation flow to begin.

Early calls for innovation implicitly signal what kinds of effort "count." When relevance and future positioning are emphasized, people are more likely to speak up, explore problems and invest effort before results are clear. These meanings do not remain abstract: they shape what people believe is worth noticing, articulating, and investing effort in at the very start of the innovation flow.

APPENDIX 2. HOW TRIGGERS WORK IN PRACTICE: EVIDENCE FROM INTERVIEWS

This appendix illustrates how innovation triggers are experienced and described by practitioners in everyday work. Across interviews, triggers consistently appear as moments that interrupt routine and force articulation. They do not create ideas, but make existing, often silent awareness speakable.

1. INTERNAL FRICTION: WHEN INEFFICIENCY BECOMES VISIBLE PAIN

Experts frequently described innovation starting when inefficiencies accumulate to a point where continuing routine work is no longer acceptable. Articulation occurs when problems can no longer be absorbed informally and inefficiency turns into visible operational pain.

"Innovation can simply be doing a job more easily than before."

— Technology Development Manager · Logistics & Infrastructure · Finland

"Innovation only happens when solving a real issue."

— Senior Innovation Leader · Logistics & Ecommerce · Finland

How it works in practice:

Inefficiencies → repeated workarounds → visible pain → articulation becomes necessary.

2. EXTERNAL EXPOSURE: CUSTOMER AND MARKET REALITY

Direct exposure to customers or markets often forces ideas into articulation. Respondents described innovation emerging when internal solutions no longer align with customer behavior, regulatory requirements, or external benchmarks.

"Innovation starts from customer or business need."

— Innovation Lead · Logistics & Postal Services · Finland

"Innovation is closer to the customers, not in headquarters."

— Innovation & R&D Leader · Imaging & Hardware Technology · Finland

"Innovation is driven by challenges that are relevant for our customers."

— Head of Innovation & Venture Building · Engineering & Consulting · Denmark

How it works in practice:

External interaction → mismatch becomes visible → internal assumptions questioned → articulation follows.

3. INFORMAL SENSEMAKING: CONVERSATIONS AND EMOTIONAL ENERGY

Many ideas surface through informal interaction rather than formal processes. Respondents emphasized the role of conversations, communities, and shared reflection in combining observations and generating emotional energy around ideas. Articulation follows collective sensemaking, not formal prompts.

"People are going around here, hearing things, combining them in their heads. And then somebody comes with an idea."

— *Innovation & R&D Leader · Chemicals & Materials · Finland*

"Communities are passion-driven knowledge networks."

— *Head of Innovation & Venture Building · Engineering & Consulting · Denmark*

"They gave us new perspectives, new ideas, new energy."

— *Innovation & Strategy Lead · Consumer Goods & Branding · Sweden*

How it works in practice:

Conversation and exchange → shared interpretation → emotional energy → articulation.

4. LEADERSHIP SIGNALS: WHEN SPEAKING UP BECOMES EXPECTED

Leadership does not create ideas, but respondents consistently highlighted its role in defining when articulation is expected and safe. Strategic priorities, innovation calls, or pilot initiatives act as temporal signals—*now this matters*.

"If people don't have support from top management, they would not spend time on it."

— *Head of Innovation & Venture Building · Engineering & Consulting · Denmark*

"Ideas can stay there for a long time if there is no management prioritization."

— *Innovation & R&D Leader · Imaging & Hardware Technology · Finland*

How it works in practice:

Strategic signal → legitimacy to engage → articulation becomes socially acceptable.

5. SUMMARY INSIGHT

Across interviews, triggers operate by interrupting routine and lowering the cost of articulation. When routine dominates unchecked, reflection decreases and ideas remain silent. The evidence shows that managing innovation begins with recognizing, legitimizing and responding to triggers when they emerge.

APPENDIX 3. COMMUNITY STRUCTURES IN PRACTICE

Interview Evidence on Community-Based Sensemaking

This appendix documents how interviewees describe the organization of collaborative spaces used to discuss, reframe, and develop innovation ideas in practice. Across organizations, these structures function as **repeatable environments for discussion and coordination**, rather than one-off meetings.

While respondents use different names — teams, networks, communities or forums — the report

- **Open peer communities** – spaces for raising issues and articulating early ideas (Externalization)
- **Small autonomous groups** – spaces for synchronous dialogue where ideas are discussed and stabilized (Objectivation)
- **Cross-functional coordination groups** – structures that connect departments when solutions move toward operational adoption (Internalization)

1. OPEN PEER COMMUNITIES

(Externalization – raising issues and articulating ideas)

These spaces allow employees to surface observations and early ideas before formal evaluation.

Trusted networks and informal guidance

“The most promising, the most impactful is network... it’s guidance, it’s talking.”

— Innovation Lead · Energy & Utilities · Finland

Brainstorming sessions and hackathons

“We do a lot of hackathon... brainstorming... proof of concepts... letting people go through pilots.”

— Innovation Manager · ICT & Digital Platforms · Finland

Team-level conversations and managerial dialogue

“I have to talk to my team... go to my team leader... saying: I have an idea.”

— Innovation Manager · ICT & Digital Platforms · Finland

2. SMALL AUTONOMOUS GROUPS

(Objectivation – discussion, reframing and stabilization of ideas)

At this stage, ideas are discussed within **small groups that enable synchronous dialogue**, allowing meaning and ownership to stabilize before formal evaluation.

Small internal team discussions

“We seriously go through that and we talk through it as a team and say which of those ideas do we want to take further.”

— Director · Growth & Development · Energy & Industrial Systems · Netherlands

Core teams within professional communities

"They use in the core teams to meet... they discuss initiatives and products... in a digital, virtual way."

— Innovation Director · Engineering & Consulting · Denmark

Small face-to-face groups

"Traditional meeting... physically present... completely different type of communication than sitting behind the screen."

— Senior R&D Manager · Materials & Process Industry · Finland

3. CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COORDINATION GROUPS

(Internalization – coordination and operational handovers)

At later stages, innovation work often requires cross-department coordination to align decisions and organize operational adoption.

Innovation boards and recurring forums

"Every month we have an innovation board, which is a meeting where all the ideas are presented."

— Director of Innovation · Consumer Goods & Manufacturing · Finland

Virtual co-creation sessions (internal and external)

"Pilots involved startups, company engineers, and often customers in virtual co-creation sessions."

— Innovation Director · Engineering & Consulting · Denmark

SUMMARY

Across cases, organizations rely on different collaborative formats to support innovation flow.

Despite variations in naming and structure, these groups share several common characteristics:

- regular interaction embedded in everyday work
- non-hierarchical discussion environments
- shared ownership of emerging ideas
- knowledge exchange across teams
-

These structures also act as **containers of innovation memory**, retaining learning from discussions, pilots, and iterations so ideas remain visible and can return for further development.

HOW INNOVATION HAPPENS

Insights from Leading Enterprises in Times of Change 2025

Bridgium is a high-impact joint research initiative by Albi Marketing Oy and Digitune Oy and dedicated to dive deep into the phenomenon of innovation.

Connect with the Bridgium team to explore how innovation flows across teams and where it slows down. Working with Bridgium helps you identify: bottlenecks in your innovation flow, recognize hidden potential of your teams, align structure and people around innovation in your company.



Artem Verlin
CEO at Digitune
Communications & Partnerships

"Data tells you what is happening. Our interviews told us why it is happening."



Natalia Illarionova
Founder and CEO at Albimarketing
MA, Sociology

"Our research is a map drawn by those who are actually leading the market."



Kristina Verlin
CMO at Digitune
Marketing & Business Development

"Our mission was to translate 50 individual perspectives into one collective roadmap."