

Module 4: Collaboration for innovation:

Overview:

With an increasingly competitive and globalised business market, it's never been more important to understand how sustainability and innovation link and the importance of collaborations to develop and implement innovations. Within this module, you'll learn about collaboration and network building, to ensure your future collaborations can help you develop and implement innovations.

Use this module to gain insights to confidently build your own collaborations. You'll work through examples, templates and case studies to see collaborative innovation in action, and identify the techniques that work, and the ones that don't.

By the end of this module, you will have the skills and confidence to create, deploy, and monitor your innovation collaborations.

Syllabus:

Collaboration and network building- how networks can help you develop and implement innovation.

Sustainability innovation- how sustainable innovation transcends ordinary innovation.

Learning objectives:

By the end of this module learners will:

- Have learned how collaborations can help with developing and implementing innovations.
- Understand how sustainability and innovation link.
- Have mapped their innovation networks using the CASCADE network mapping template.

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Introduction:

This module is about ideas. We all have ideas, but some people’s ideas seem to have more impact than others. We explore how creative ideas emerge, how they develop and gain impact, and how they start on the journey towards changing your world and driving your own success. This module will help equip you with the skills and tools to enable you to successfully create better ideas and turn your ideas a reality.

Glossary:

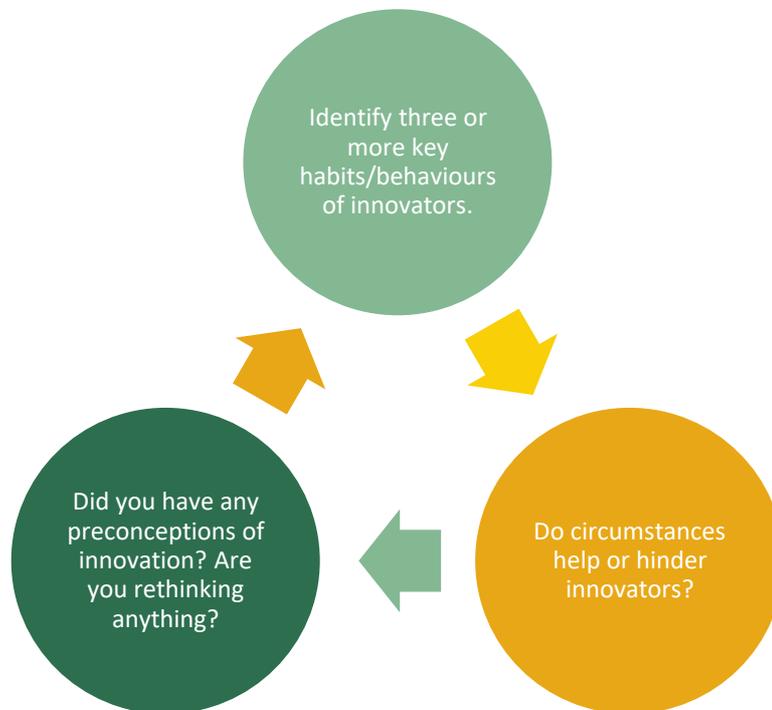
	Creativity	Creativity is the process of generating ideas*.
	Innovation	Innovation is developing impactful ideas that create change.
	Enterprise	Enterprise is acting on those ideas to bring them into reality.
	Entrepreneurship	Building organisations as vehicles to help deliver impact.
	Testing	Testing your assumptions on real people in the real world.

*These do not have to be good ones.

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Activity: Consider (150 words, 10 mins)

Innovators don't all look or act the same, they can be seen all over the world throughout history. Summarise your thoughts exploring your ideas about who innovators are and what they do. Consider:



Explanation:

Innovation can often seem straightforward, someone has a good idea, develops it, and takes it to market. Connecting ideas and resources is critically important in developing innovations, alongside your interests and ambitions. Many people have ideas, the success of these is the actions taken to test and implement them.

New ideas are often resisted, as they may be counter-intuitive, disruptive to the status quo, or just silly. Successful innovators all have the same characteristic of willingness to keep trying and persistence to keep finding ways to make their ideas happen.

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Activity: Consider (150 words, 15 minutes)

We interviewed several successful entrepreneurs, and asked about the development of innovations, and barriers along the way. Do you identify with any of the things being said in these case studies? Why? What is it about them that is interesting to you?

Entrepreneur A:

“It’s never a smooth journey, people ask if my plans developed smoothly, the truth is there has been a lot of trial and error... The difference is not seeing it as a failure, but as a learning opportunity to do things differently next time. My advice is to pick something you are passionate about, not just something you think will make a huge amount of money, then when you know it isn’t impossible, you just haven’t worked out the right solution, you have the motivation to keep trying.”

Entrepreneur B:

“We’re small scale manufacturing now, and that’s completely changed the way that we have to think about ourselves and think about how we’re communicating, we’re in the middle of that transition, establishing costs such as what we’re going to be charging people for wholesale and services... once we’ve got that nailed down a bit more, we’re going to be going more towards connecting with other businesses about how to provide services for them as opposed to straight up just selling our products or our services on social media.”

Entrepreneur C:

“You’ve got people that have been brought up in a family of entrepreneurs where they’re well networked and used to seeing people make big business deals and outsource things. We’re in a community where people give you grief if you try and do something... There’s lots of little dynamic choices that we make, the culture that we’re in, it’s not a level playing field.”

Entrepreneur D:

“In our company everything is born out of chaos... there is no time for planning... everything happens too fast... but we always respond to and create the customers’ needs.”

How collaboration helps with developing and implementing innovations:

Innovation must be nourished for it to flourish. It is important to talk about ideas to work out viability, and open your eyes to other areas you could develop. SME’s are often reluctant to talk about their ideas, for fear of them being stolen, but you must remember, people are busy, have their own work going on, and the risks of your ideas being stolen are outweighed by the benefits of other perspectives on an idea to help refinement.

Talking about your ideas is an important part of the development process. Some ideas are “born ugly”, you will initially find people question your ideas, and this might make you think

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you are wasting your time. However, collecting different opinions on a topic is a useful exercise, and those who doubt you may provide your most useful feedback, as you can work to find a solution or mitigate the situation they perceived, transforming your ideas from a nugget of thought to something impactful and attractive.

Activity: Consider (150 words, 10 mins)

Explore your ideas about why networks might be important for innovation and summarise your thoughts. Consider the following:

How important are networks for getting started and gaining momentum?

How have you utilised your networks to develop your ideas?

Why do you think networks are important?

Where, when and within whom, do you have your best ideas?

Can you think of any ways you could become more connected?

What kinds of people or groups could you do more to interact with that might be relevant to your ideas or ambitions?

What kinds of places might be more conducive to you for having ideas or helping develop those ideas?

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Links between sustainability and innovation:

Why is sustainability important?

Sustainability helps companies approach situations differently, through thinking about different subjects (such as emissions), or thinking differently about existing subjects (such as sustainable supply chains). Sustainability is strongly tied to the ability of the company to innovate, driving innovation by adding constraints.

How sustainability influences innovation:

SME's are often less well-resourced than corporations, and without the financial backing and man power behind them, often find their time is spent on matters to do with the day-to-day operation. However, as the devastating impact of the pandemic continues to be felt, values-based engagement with sustainability is hugely important. Re-examining your perspective of what is important and viewing situations from a different point of view, can help you tap into new ideas and unlock your innovative potential.

Benefits to developing sustainability best practices:



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Activity: Current resources profile (150 words, 10 mins)

Your personal values, interests, skills, and connections are a powerful motivational guide, giving you a strategic advantage, which is difficult to emulate. Evidence suggests successful entrepreneurs start their ventures based on existing strengths, resources, and interests.

Using this principle, try to write a little about:

Identity:
Who are you?

Interests and passions: Hobbies, niche interests, specialist subjects, what do you love?

Values and motivations: What principles and ethics are important to you? What causes motivate you? What do you care about?

Knowledge base:
What do you know?

What knowledge do you have from education or work experience?

What skills and competencies can you demonstrate to a good level?

What are you better at?

What do people admire you for?

Networks:
Who do you know?

What industries, fields of knowledge or resources* do you have good access to through family links?

What industries, fields of knowledge or resources do you have good access to through friends and acquaintances?

What industries, fields of knowledge or resources do you have good access to through work experience or education?

*Resources might include space, equipment, funding, material and further connections

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Summary:

Sustainability and innovation are natural partners, innovation is about making things better in the long term. In this day and age, businesses are embracing the idea that resources should not be used faster than they can be replenished, and the demand for sustainable innovation is a huge driver for business growth across a multitude of industries. Sustainable innovation transcends traditional innovation, driven by concerns for the environment and resources used. Ideas, concepts, and products are leveraged to achieve environmentally aware designs and business practices.

Sustainable innovation is far more disruptive than traditional innovation, often resulting in better business models, improved processes to reduce costs and waste, streamlined resource flow, and new market sectors. As the COP-26 conference has shown us, consumers are aware of environmental and social issues, and want to support enterprises who align with their personal values. Ignorance of the need for sustainability is becoming difficult, as the population and waste production continue to grow, the market power of sustainable business also grows. SME's can work collaboratively to help disrupt the status quo, through unlocking the value of sustainable innovations across industries, and leaving behind non-sustainable corporations.

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CASCADE network mapping template:

It is useful to take some time and think about your network. Your family, your friends, local businesses you use, suppliers of materials.

We've started the network mapping template below for a collaborator with the Cascade project. Ruth started a business hand spinning yarns and needed to innovate because of Covid. She first looked at her network to see what help she could call on. You will see some of the people in her network were friends and family, but others were not personally known to her, but identified through searching online or from speaking to other people.

Who do I know?	What do they do?	Could we work together?	Next steps
Father	Knows about website design	Could he help with creating an online shop?	Arrange a planning meeting
College friend who runs amateur choirs	Large network of retired members, would they like a new hobby during lockdown	Will she share information with her members?	Phone call to ask about this
Local sheep farmer	Rears single-breed and rare sheep	Would he sell a small number of fleeces to me instead of at auction	Email with proposition
Local craft club	Started running Zoom meetings	Could I learn how to teach people spinning via Zoom?	Join in Zoom sessions and take notes to learn how best to do online classes

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Business Development Manager at bank	Know about funding for female entrepreneurs	Can I get support or advice for my crowd-funding?	Arrange meeting
<p>Ruth’s network helped her to crowd fund and take part in the Nat West Women’s Enterprise Scheme which matched the amount she raised online. The local farmer sold her fleeces which she used to equip boxes she sent out to people wanting to learn to spin online. She linked up with the choir members, some of whom learned to spin during lockdown as singing was not allowed. Her father introduced her to a colleague who helped by building an online shop which enabled her business to grow.</p>			

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