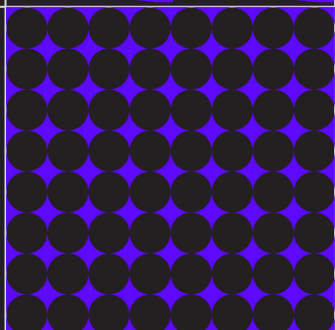
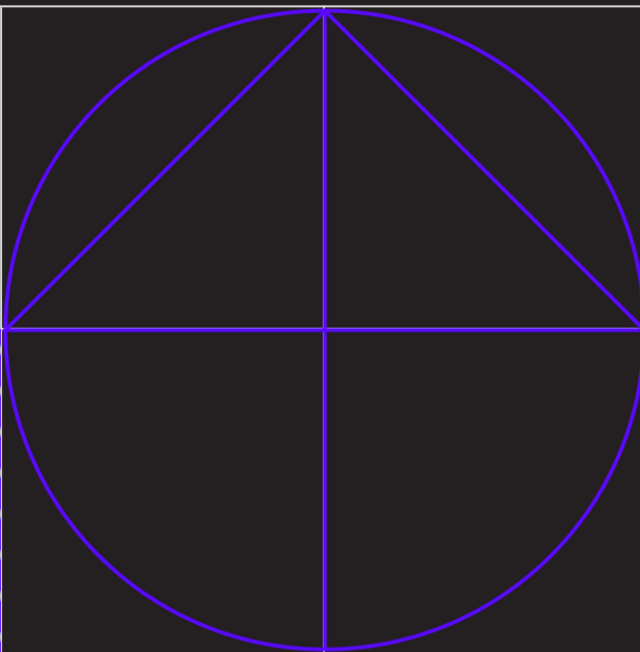
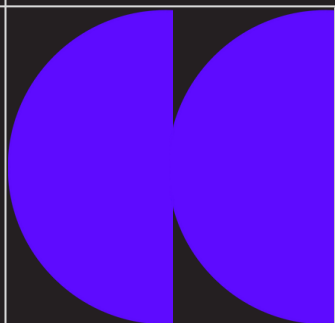


INNOVATION NORTH



Session 5 Key INsights:

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE



INsights On Collaborative Governance

Many of the complex problems that organizations face today, such as the public health crisis, racial injustice, and climate change, cannot be addressed by any individual or organization despite their impact. They need collaborations between public and private sectors and NGOs. However, these collaborations are often very challenging as there are significant differences in perspectives, interests, and ways of working across organizations, disciplines, and sectors.

Throughout the Lab, Jorrit de Jong explored how organizations can overcome these obstacles to innovate through collaboration successfully. Using the case method, participants discussed what collaborative governance means, why we need it and what makes it challenging, and how to manage the tension that can flow from collaborations.

The Importance Of Unlearning For Collaboration

One of the prominent insights that emerged from the co-learning process was the importance of 'unlearning' habits developed for dealing with 'tame' (i.e. relatively easy) problems. The effective habits used to address tame problems become sources of conflict when collaboration is required to tackle complex problems. Our previous collaborative efforts for dealing with tame problems involved finding a solution for a problem at hand. So, we start from a pre-defined problem, reach out to people or stakeholders that we deem fit for the purpose, and collaborate to tackle the problem.

However, to tackle complex problems, which are difficult to understand with a simple cause and effect framework, a clear, focused and pre-defined problem acts as a roadblock for successful collaboration when problem definitions do not align. In this setting, defining the problem is the first thing to address collaboratively.

Collectively defining our problem allows us to develop a range of scenarios about how the future could unfold to inform our decisions and guide our actions in the present. It also ensures that potential solutions incorporate collaborative structures to integrate different perspectives, capabilities, and resources.

Diverse backgrounds and perspectives in a team are no longer obstacles for collaboration but rather inspirations as the team's composition can influence our ability to envision future needs and solutions that we can develop.

Collaboration Is A Process, Not An Event

Another lesson for successful collaboration was that collaboration should not be seen as an event. Instead, it is a process that must be iterative and continuously reviewed. Complex problems, almost by definition, cannot be solved at once. Therefore, the criteria that define 'successful' collaboration should include whether learning occurred in the collaboration process and whether there are sustained collaboration efforts where the previous collaboration's learnings could be applied. As Jorrit emphasized, "It is a failure only when you don't learn from it."

Other Reflections

Karl Weick, a famous organizational theorist, had advised to people interested in changing their organization that chaotic action is preferable to orderly inaction. Weick (1979: 245) explains, "[a]ction, when viewed retrospectively, clarifies what the organization is doing, what business it is in, and what its projects may be. Inaction, viewed retrospectively, is more puzzling and more senseless...Actions, in other words, provide tangible items that can be attended to."

This Lab session allowed us to learn about the real challenges organizations face in their collaborative efforts and how they are motivated to engage with the complex problems through collaborations. We were also excited to observe how much collective learning could occur when so many leading organizations in their respective fields come together and learn from each other.

Citation: **Innovation North Research Team.** (2020). Session 5 Key INsights: Collaborative Governance. Innovation North, Powered By Ivey, London, ON.

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