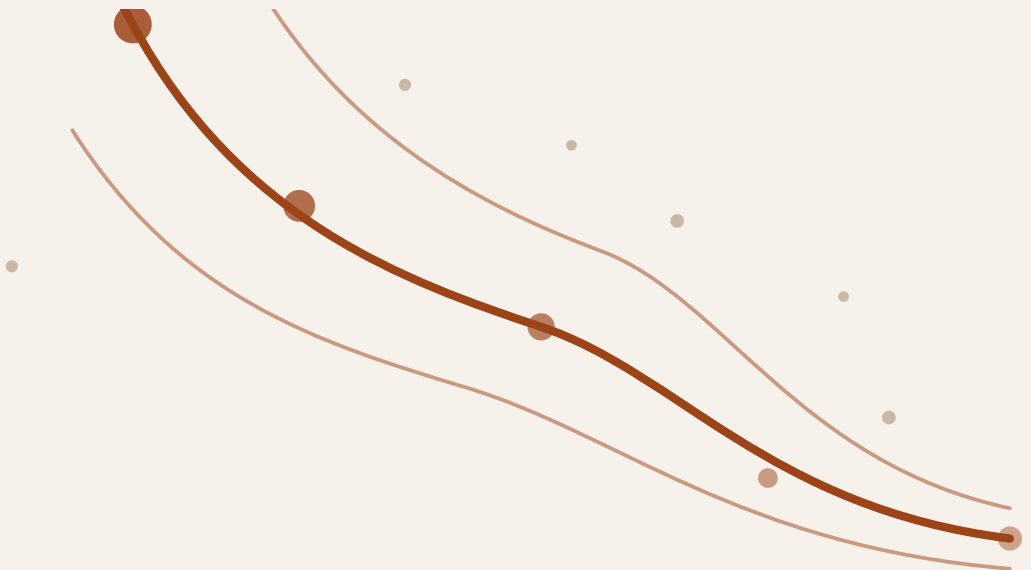


Innovation Management

From scattered initiatives
to a sustained organizational capability

Dr. Omar A. Alsamani



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Chapter 5

5 The innovation management system

In this chapter we present the framework that moves innovation from scattered efforts, hostage to personal connections and chance, to a regular practice that can be understood and improved: the difference between a process and a system, the system's six stages and where decisions sit within them, and the requirements of the international standard for innovation management systems, **ISO 56001**.

Introduction

Opening case: an innovation procedure (composite case)

One organization adopted a six-stage “innovation procedure,” published it in an elegant handbook, and hung its flowchart in the building's corridors. A year later, a review revealed that dozens of proposals were still sitting in the “evaluation” stage with no decision, that two successful pilots had stalled at their conclusion because no one had been assigned to run the solution, and that most employees did not even know how their idea could reach the first stage.

This organization had a written **process**, but it did not have a **system**. The flowchart describes the road; traveling it requires someone to decide at every turn, someone to fund, someone to take over the solution at the end, and a channel that connects the road to people where they work. These elements, which make the road passable, are the focus of this chapter.

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, the reader should be able to:

- 1 Distinguish between the innovation process and the innovation management system.
- 2 Describe the six stages of the innovation management system, the output of each, and its common failure.
- 3 Design decision points that keep initiatives from remaining unresolved.
- ε Bring the system closer to people so that it captures opportunities from everyday work.
- 0 Explain the structure of the **ISO 56001** standard and the limits of its usefulness.

5.1 Process and system

Organizations usually have more ideas than capacity to test and implement them. The problem, more often than not, is the absence of a pathway that singles out the important opportunities, gives resources to the promising ones, stops those that are not progressing, and ties success to adoption. This is where we need to distinguish between two concepts that are frequently confused.

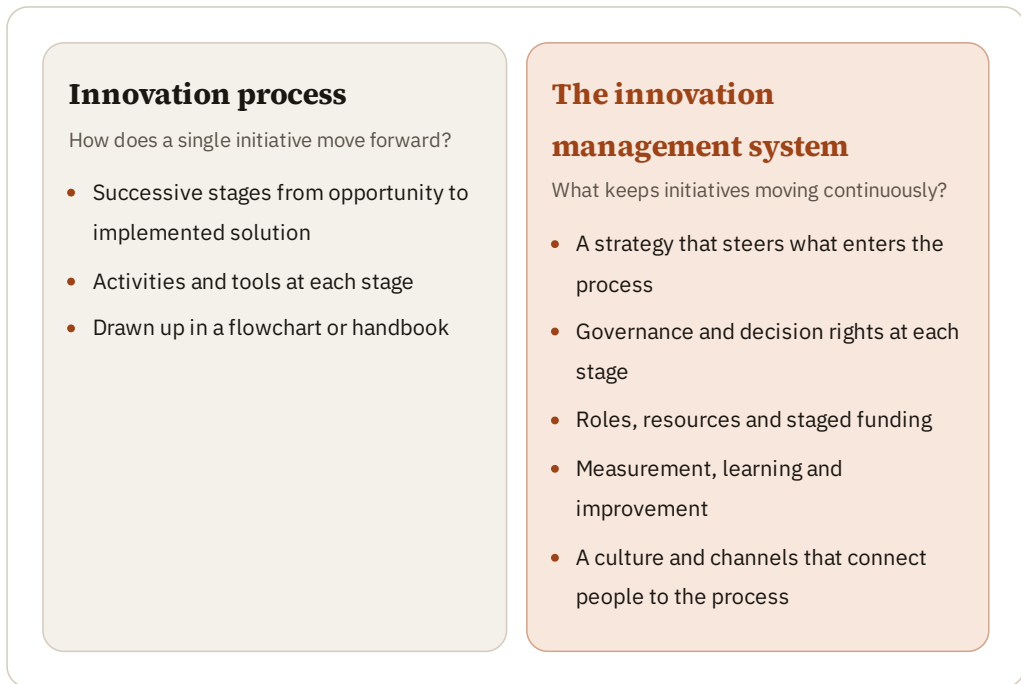


Figure 5.1 The process is part of the system: the former describes the road, and the latter ensures it is traveled.

The international series of standards defines an innovation management system as a set of interrelated and interacting elements of an organization aimed at realizing value (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2025). This covers managing the daily flow of opportunities and involving people in it, as well as the governance that determines who decides and how resources are allocated. It now becomes clear what happened in the opening case: the process was there, but the system was missing.

5.2 The six stages

Models of the innovation process essentially agree on a path that begins with searching for opportunities, moves on to selecting what merits investment, then to implementation, and finally to capturing value (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). In this book we break that path down into six stages that operate in a continuous cycle: strategy, opportunity capture, evaluation and selection, initiative setup,

pilot, and scaling. The first stage is foundational; the next three form the engine of the system, turning inputs into projects; and the last two carry the solution into practice.

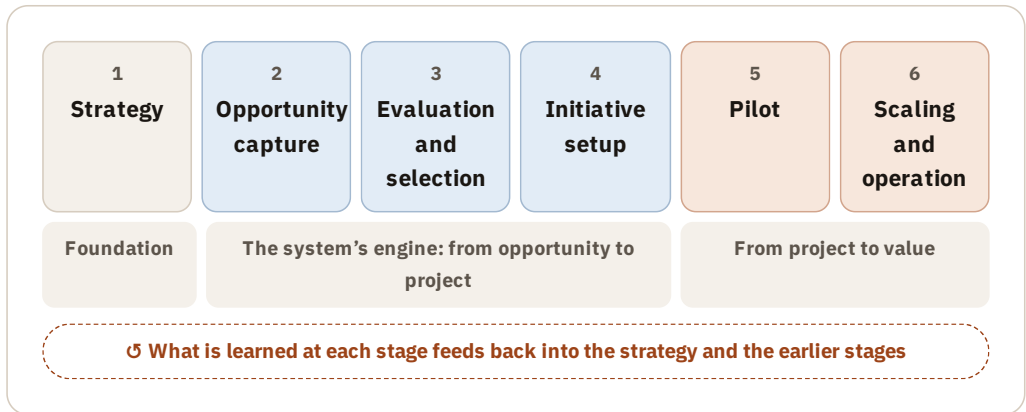


Figure 5.2 The six stages of the innovation management system. Source: prepared by the author based on Tidd & Bessant (2021) and ISO (2024).

Table 5.1 The purpose, output and common failure of each stage

Stage	Purpose	Output	Common failure
Strategy	Steering what enters the system	Search fields, challenge questions and criteria	An open call for any idea, with no priorities
Opportunity capture	Discovering needs and opportunities worth considering	Opportunities described and grouped, kept separate from solutions	Storing ideas instead of understanding needs
Evaluation and selection	Determining what merits the cost of the next round of learning	A declared decision: explore, merge, defer or decline	Long waits with no decision or response

Stage	Purpose	Output	Common failure
Initiative setup	Turning the opportunity into a learning project	A leader, a small team, a sponsor, initial funding and hypotheses	No unit identified to take over the solution later
Pilot	Testing the solution in a real-world setting	Evidence on value, adoption and cost	A pilot without success criteria defined in advance
Scaling and operation	Turning the solution into a sustainable operational capability	An owner, a budget, training and indicators	A successful pilot that stalls because no one took it over

These stages are not a rigid production line. An initiative may return to an earlier stage, change direction, or stop. The value of the system lies in its shared language and clear decisions and responsibilities, combined with enough flexibility to accommodate the different paths initiatives take. In Part III of the book we examine in detail what happens within these stages: understanding problems, developing solutions, experimentation, and adoption and scaling.

5.3

The decision at each stage

Every transition between stages ends in a decision, and that decision takes one of five forms: continue, continue with modifications, merge with another initiative, suspend temporarily, or stop. It should rest on what has changed in the evidence, the risks and the expected value, independent of the effort already spent or the standing of the person behind the idea.

Yet the absence of a decision is more damaging to the system than a wrong one. An initiative that is neither accepted nor rejected remains in what we call **decision limbo**: it consumes its owners’ attention, nothing is learned from it,

and it teaches those around it that taking the initiative is not worth the trouble. This is what happened to dozens of proposals in the opening case. A good system prevents this limbo through three simple means:

- **A published response time** at each stage, for which the person responsible for the decision alone is held accountable.
- **A written, reasoned response** to every proposal, even when it declines to take the proposal further.
- **A periodic review** of initiatives that have overrun their time, so that they are either resolved or the reason for their suspension is made public.

These means may look procedural, but their effect is above all human: a reasoned response preserves the idea owner's sense of being valued and teaches them something, and a published time frame respects their time. We return to decision rights and gates in Chapter 10.

5.4 A system close to people

The system's value begins at the opportunity capture stage, the stage that connects the system to people. Organizations often limit this stage to a single channel removed from everyday work, such as an online platform, an annual competition or a standalone center, and wait for people to bring their ideas to it. As a result, only an enthusiastic few reach it, while most people, and with them their close-up knowledge of problems, remain outside the system.

The system best able to capture opportunities is the one that goes to people where they work: in unit meetings, in performance reviews, in everyday work tools, and in dealings with beneficiaries. At a university, for example, capture channels widen when some course assignments and projects become an entry point into the innovation ecosystem, rather than the innovation center remaining an entity cut off from the classrooms and unknown to many students.

In Practice

Trace the last ten opportunities that entered your organization’s innovation system: where did they come from? If they all came from one channel or from the same people, the system sees only a small part of the organization.

5.5 The international standard ISO 56001

The first edition of **ISO 56001** was published in September 2024. It specifies requirements for an innovation management system that an organization can use to develop and demonstrate its innovation capability (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2024). It differs from the guidance standard **ISO 56002** in setting out requirements that can be audited and certified by accredited independent bodies (Fernandez & Swart, 2025). The standard follows the harmonized structure of the International Organization for Standardization’s management system standards and comprises seven main clauses:

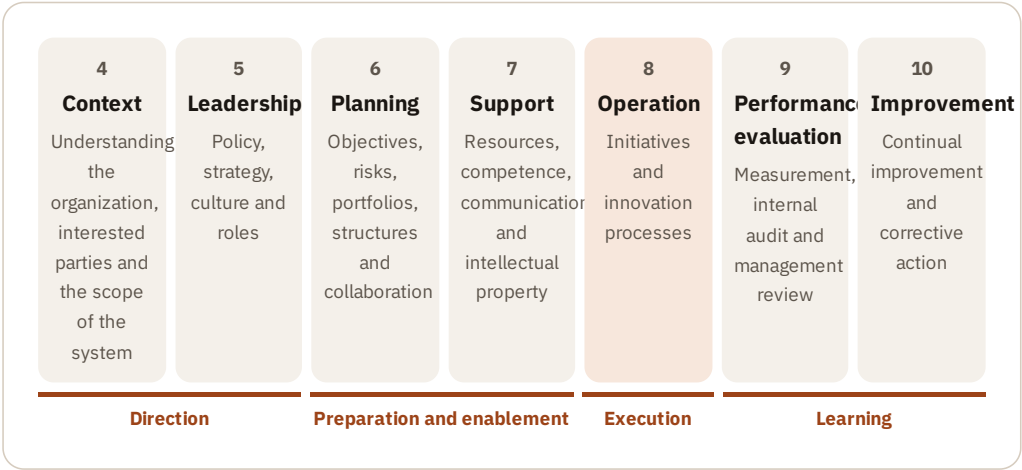


Figure 5.3 The main clauses of **ISO 56001:2024**. Source: adapted from **ISO (2024)**.

Clause 8 specifies five innovation processes: identifying opportunities, creating concepts, validating concepts, developing solutions, and deploying solutions (ISO, 2024). These processes correspond to the stages of the system in this book as follows:

Table 5.2 Correspondence between ISO 56001 processes and the stages of the system

ISO 56001 process	Corresponding stages of the system	Where it is covered in the book
Identifying opportunities	Strategy; opportunity capture	Chapters 4 and 11
Creating concepts	Evaluation and selection; initiative setup	Chapters 12 and 13
Validating concepts	Initiative setup; pilot	Chapter 14
Developing solutions	Pilot	Chapters 12 and 14
Deploying solutions	Scaling and operation	Chapter 15

The limits of the standard's usefulness

The standard is a useful organizational tool for diagnosis and comparison, but it does not produce innovation by itself. Certification can become a new form of innovation theater if effort shifts toward completing documentation rather than improving the actual flow of opportunities, decisions and value. The more productive question when applying it is: has the road from idea to value become shorter and clearer for those who travel it?

Chapter tool: system health check

Examine your organization’s innovation system stage by stage. Each stage has a sign that it is working and a sign that it has broken down. Start with the stage where the sign of breakdown is most evident, for it is the bottleneck that determines the performance of the whole system.

Chapter tool Signs of health and breakdown at each stage

Stage	A sign that it is working	A sign that it has broken down
Strategy	Employees know the current search fields and challenge questions	Proposals scattered in every direction
Opportunity capture	Opportunities come from a variety of units and levels	A few recurring sources, or a single channel
Evaluation and selection	Every proposal receives a reasoned response within a published time frame	Proposals stuck without a decision for months
Initiative setup	Every initiative has a leader, a sponsor, hypotheses and a likely operating unit	Initiatives that belong “to everyone” and are owned by no one
Pilot	Success criteria are defined before the pilot	Every pilot is declared a success
Scaling and operation	Successful solutions are handed over to an owner and a budget	Successful pilots that stall once they end

Chapter Summary

- The process describes the initiative’s road; the system ensures that the road is actually traveled, resting on strategy, governance, roles,

resources, measurement, and channels that connect people to the road.

- The innovation management system has six stages that operate in a continuous cycle, each with a specific output and a common failure.
- Every transition ends in a decision that takes one of five forms, and the most damaging thing that can befall the system is the absence of a decision. Decision limbo is prevented through a published response time, a reasoned response, and periodic review.
- The system best able to capture opportunities goes to people where they work and makes reaching it part of their day.
- **ISO 56001** sets out certifiable requirements in seven clauses and specifies five innovation processes. Its real value shows in improving the actual flow of initiatives.

Key Terms

Innovation management system

Innovation management system

The formal framework through which an organization manages the flow of opportunities and initiatives through to value realization, including strategy, governance, roles, resources and measurement.

Innovation process

Innovation process

The successive stages an initiative passes through from opportunity to implemented solution.

Decision limbo

Decision limbo

The state of an initiative that is neither accepted nor rejected, and so remains suspended without learning or impact.

Pilot Pilot	A limited run of the solution in a near-real setting to test its value and adoption before scaling.
Certification Certification	Verification by an independent body that an organization’s system conforms to the requirements of a specific standard.

Review and Discussion Questions

- 1

What is the difference between the innovation process and the innovation management system? Why is a written process not enough?

Understanding
- 2

Apply the system health check tool to your organization. Which stage is the bottleneck, and why?

Application
- 1

“The absence of a decision is more damaging than a wrong decision.” Analyze this statement from the perspective of the idea owner and from that of the organization.

Analysis
- 2

Propose two opportunity capture channels that connect the system to people where they work in your organization.

Application
- 3

When is pursuing **ISO 56001** certification useful, and when does it turn into innovation theater?

Evaluation

Chapter references

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Tidd, J., & Bessant, J. (2021). *Managing innovation: Integrating technological, market and organizational change* (7th ed.). Wiley.

How does an organization move from scattered initiatives that celebrate innovation to a sustained capability to produce it?

This book traces the path of innovation from the first signal to a solution adopted in practice that creates value, and analyzes the organizational foundations that make this path a settled practice: strategy, systems, culture, governance, teams and measurement, with people at the center.

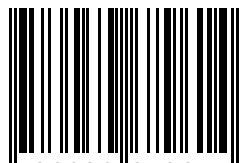
It rests on three pillars: a clear, high-priority problem; motivated people whose needs are met; and a system that connects them and turns effort into repeatable results. It combines international research evidence with the Saudi context, and pairs each chapter with a tool that can be used in a real organization.

Its twenty chapters are organized in five parts: foundations; institutional foundations and people; the initiative journey; value and the ecosystem; and an application to the university innovation ecosystem.

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