Rethinking Innovation in the Social Sector: From Big Ideas to Everyday Impact

SOCIAL IMPACT ARCHITECTS

SOCIAL TRENDSPOTTER — Latest Trends In The Social Sector

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BLOG socialimpactarchitects.com/blog

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The Future Is Here

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Shift Happens

My Generation's
First **Eye Phone**

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Mindset Matters

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

Charles Darwin

Deep Dive: https://socialimpactarchitects.com/impact-mindset

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Is Innovation Inconceivable?

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Social Innovation: Defined

[SOH-SHUHL IN-UH-VEY-SHUHN]

noun

A novel solution to a social problem that outperforms existing approaches by being more effective, efficient, sustainable or adaptable to its context.

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Public Health Innovation

[PUHB-LIK HELTH IN-UH-VEY-SHUHN]

noun

A creation and implementation of a novel process, policy, product, program, or system leading to improvements that impact health.

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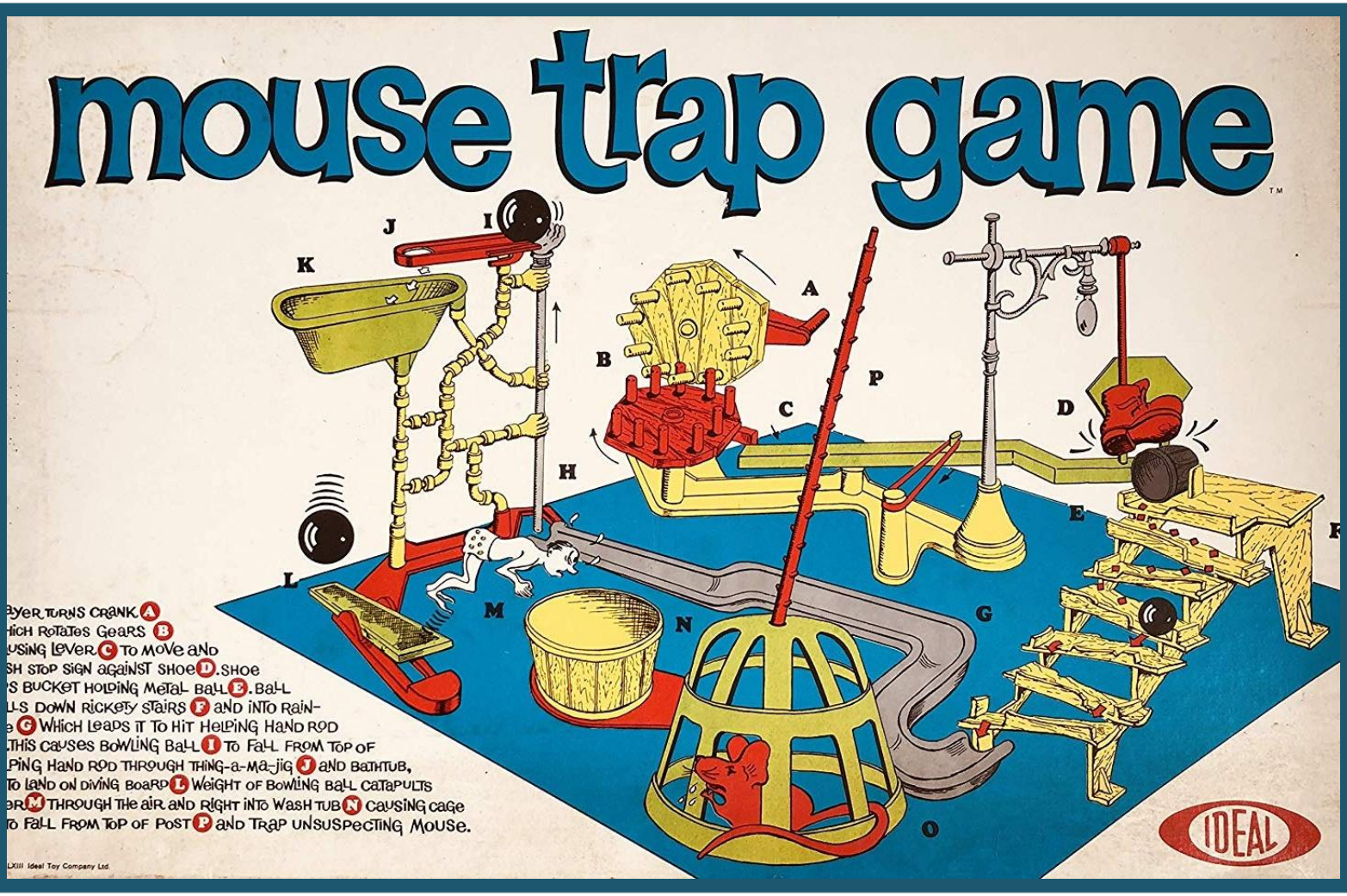

Deep Dive: https://socialimpactarchitects.com/ecosystem/

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New Game Board

Moving from Checkers to Chess

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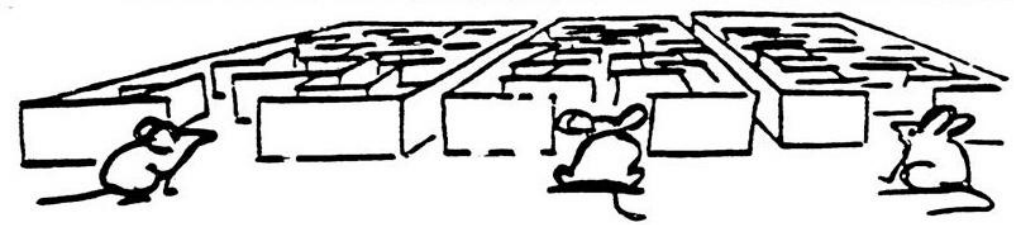
Upgrading to System Change

Individual Effort



Collaboration

System Change

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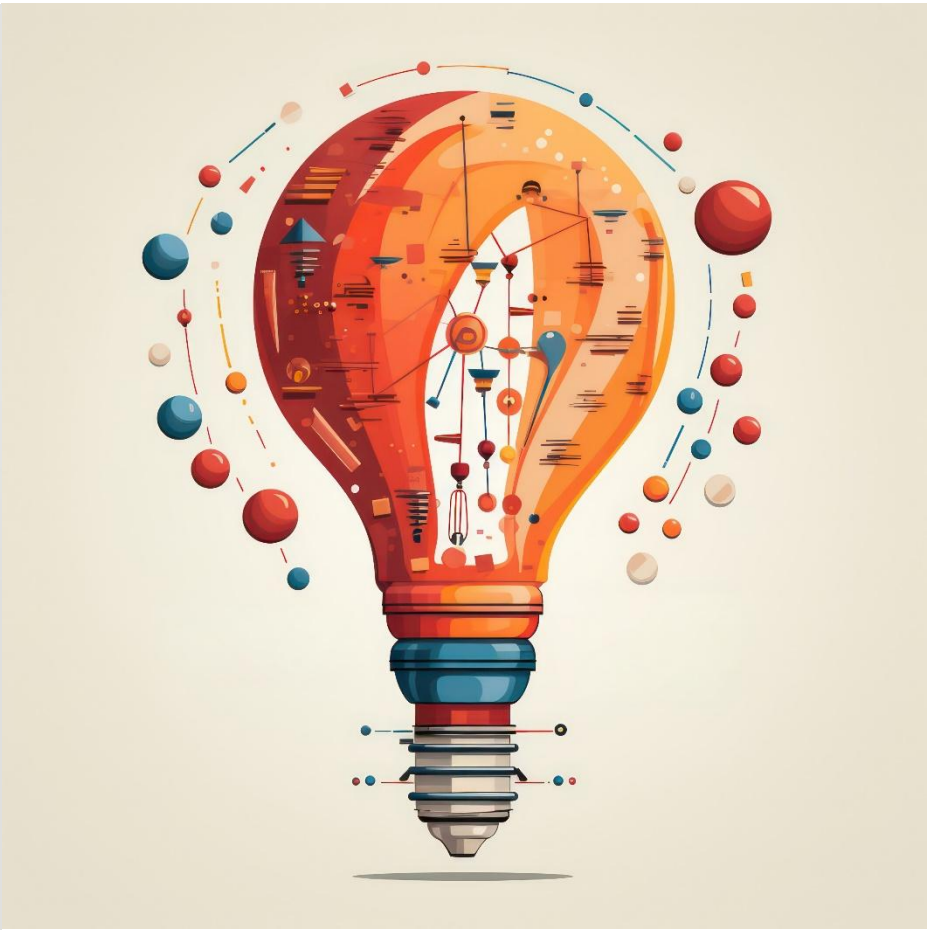
What is the Difference?

Creativity vs. Innovation



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Creativity vs. Innovation

CREATIVITY

IMAGINATION
IDEAS
THOUGHTS
PROBLEM SOLVING
CONCEPTS
INGENUITY
CREATIVE PROCESS
IDEATION

EXPRESSION
BRAINSTORMING

INNOVATION

IMPLEMENTATION
DOING
INVENTION
ACTION
NEW
PROCESS
USEFUL
CHANGE
MEASURABLE

ENABLE
VALUE
PRODUCT

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Creativity

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What Do We Know About *Creativity*?

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What Do We Know about Creativity?

Myth: Only certain people are creative.

Reality: Everyone can be creative with the right exercises.

Myth: Creativity happens through focus and depth.

Reality: Creativity happens through volume and breadth (e.g., compounding creativity).

Myth: Creativity happens when at work.

Reality: Creativity happens when at play.

Myth: Creativity requires a blank slate.

Reality: Creativity often comes from remixing what already exists.

Myth: Creativity is about big ideas.

Reality: Creativity is about small tweaks that add up.

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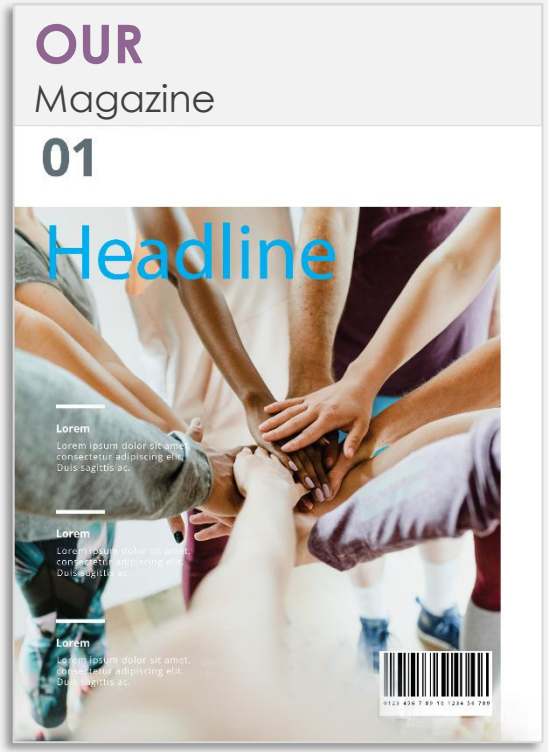
EXERCISE: Headline Exercise



ACTIVITY: Imagine a future cover in a publication (your pick) in the year 2029. This cover should include: a headline, at least one picture, and three points that tell the story

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Innovation

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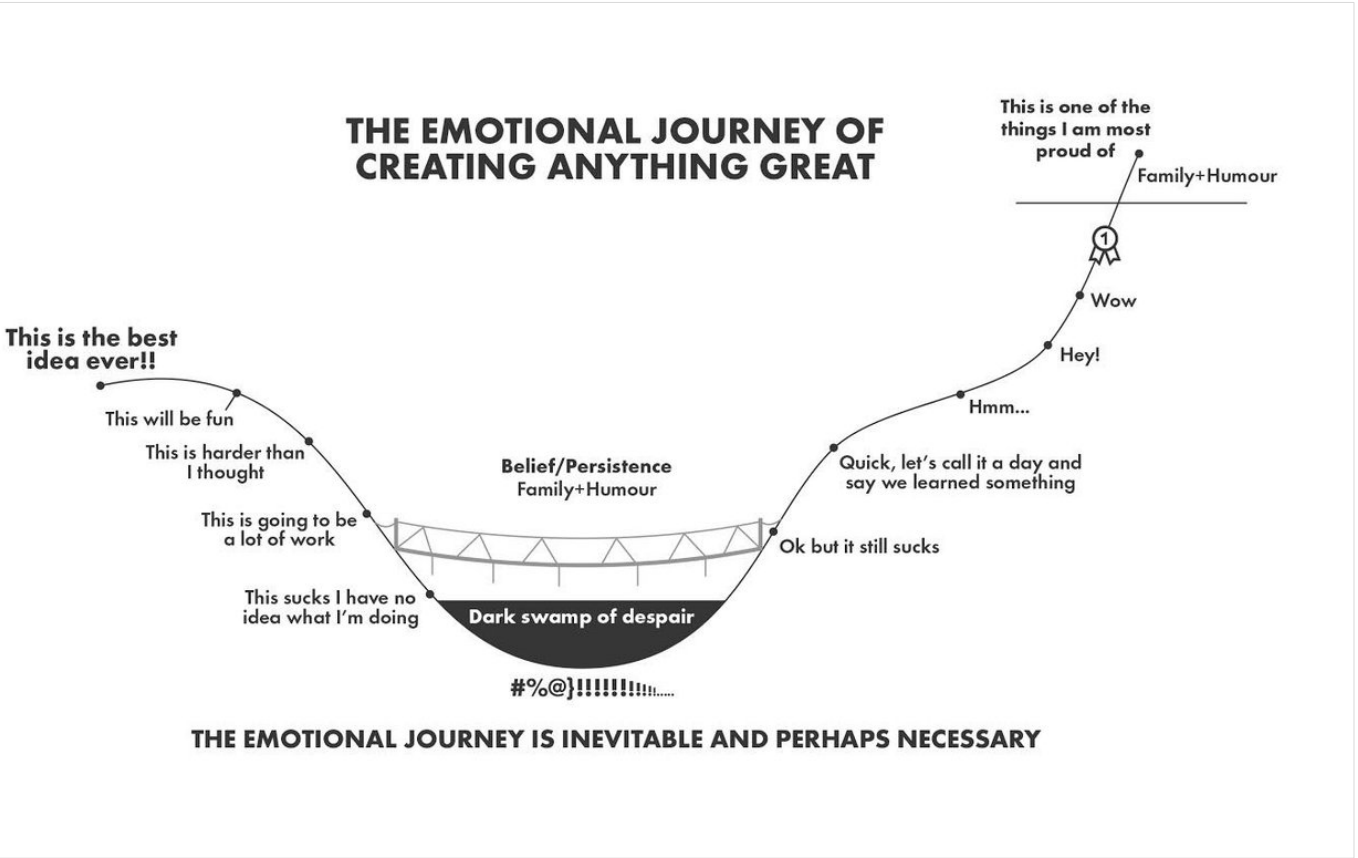
(Social) Innovators vs. Entrepreneurs

The difference between an innovator and entrepreneur is that innovators create ideas, while entrepreneurs create organizations that take IMPACTFUL ideas to scale with the potential for them to outlive their initial creator.



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If You Build It, Will People Come?

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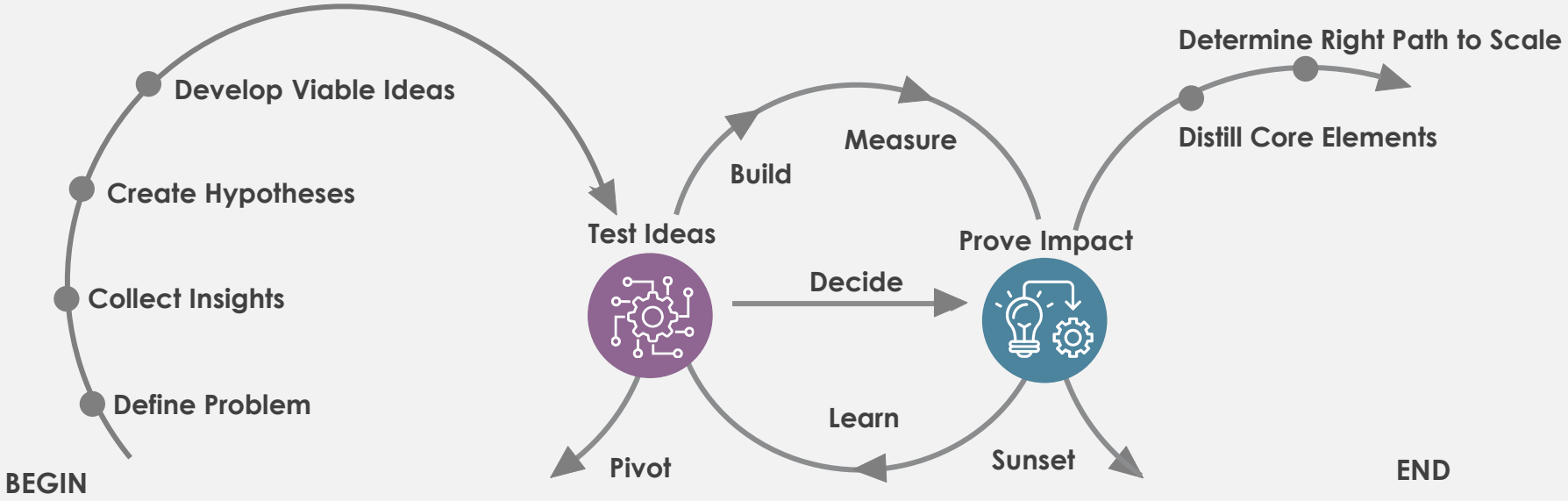
SOCIAL Alchemy

"Transformative social change — the standard by which success is measured in the social sector — takes perseverance, timing and something I like to call "social alchemy." Many start with a solution. Instead, social alchemy turns that notion upside down — starting with a problem needing to be solved. The social sector's responsibility is to take that problem, transform it into an idea and then an impactful solution, which can be scaled to create change." — Suzanne Smith



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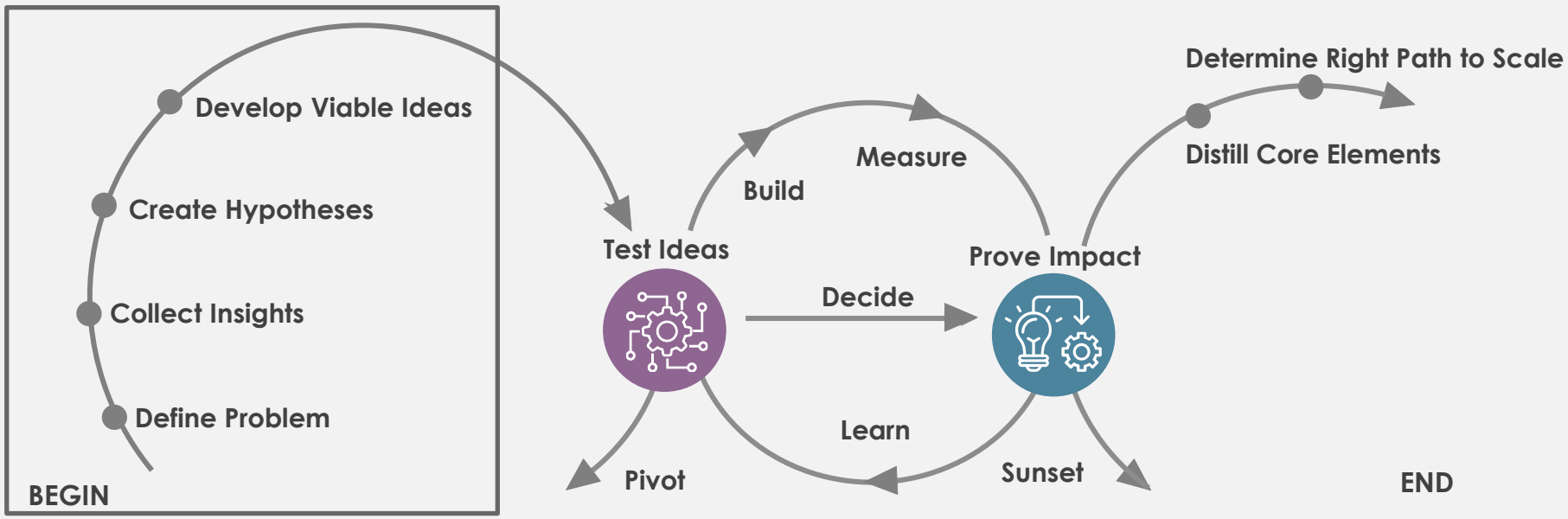
Innovate **Improve** **Impact** **Scale**

SOCIAL Alchemy: Innovate



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PURPOSE

- Focus on the problem
- Gather all the facts
- Resist assumptions
- Generate ideas for solutions using disciplined process
- Pilot possible solutions

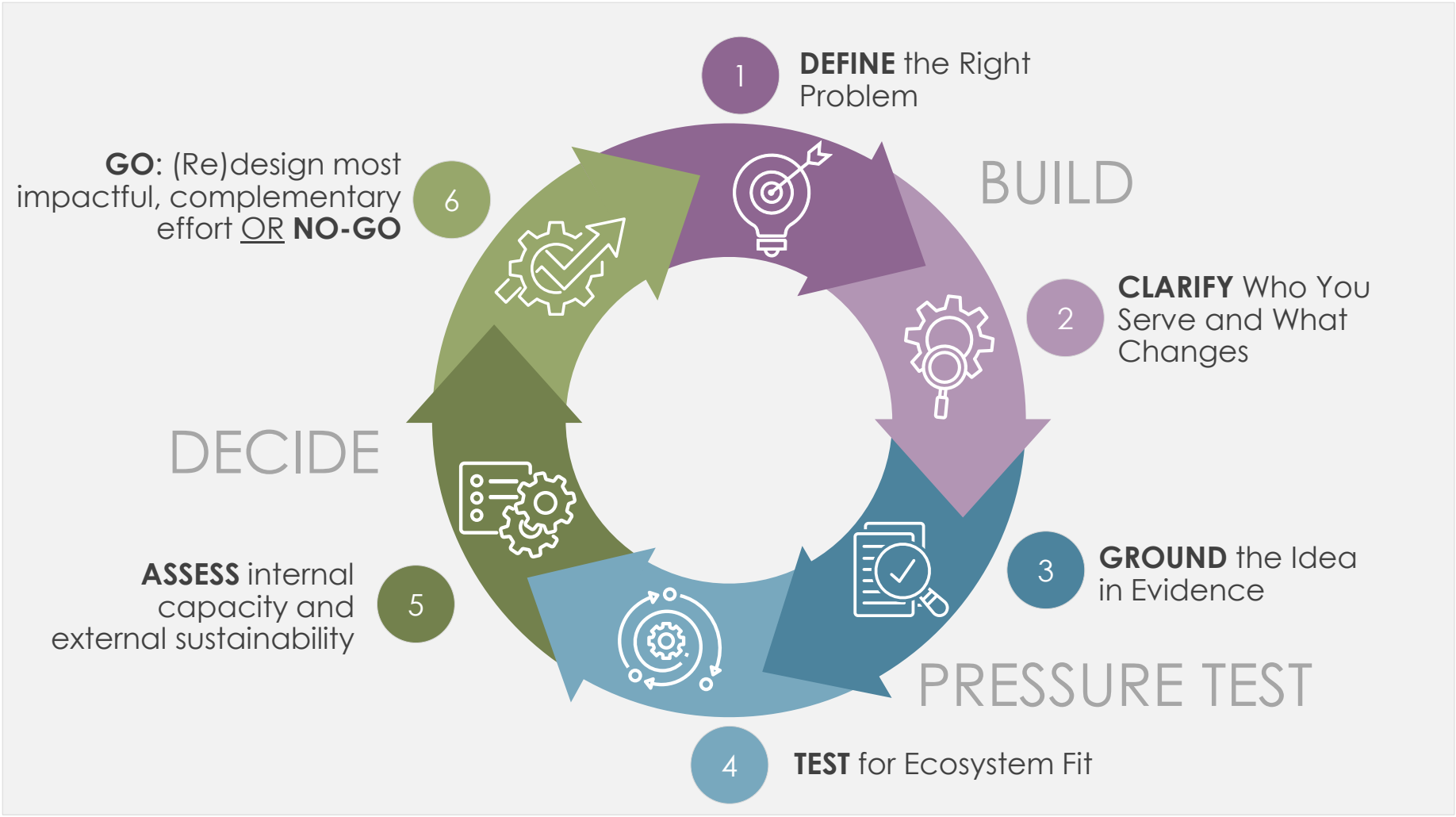
DO

- Start with the problem, not the solution
- Use secondary research to find best practices, competitors/ comparables and market conditions
- Talk to those you intend to serve

DON'T

- Fall in love with your idea
- Assume that "if you build it, people will come"

Lean Startup for Nonprofits



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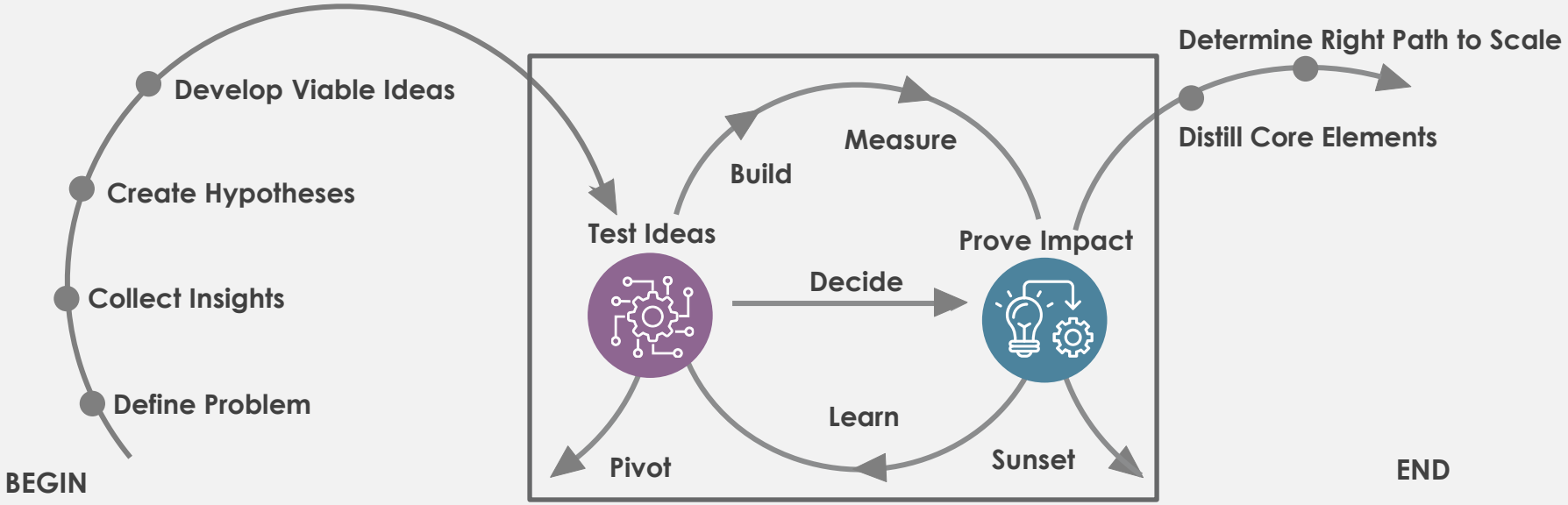
SOCIAL Alchemy: Improve & Impact



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PURPOSE

- Test and refine hypotheses based on real-world knowledge
- Apply right-sized impact measurement process
- Ensure positive effects
- Resolve unintended consequences early

DO

- Ensure the solution you implement is having a positive impact on those you serve
- Be focused and flexible
- Focus on continuous improvement to level up and as conditions change

DON'T

- Get caught in analysis paralysis
- Rely on anecdotal results to prove impact
- Get caught in an "activity trap"
- Assume you are ever done

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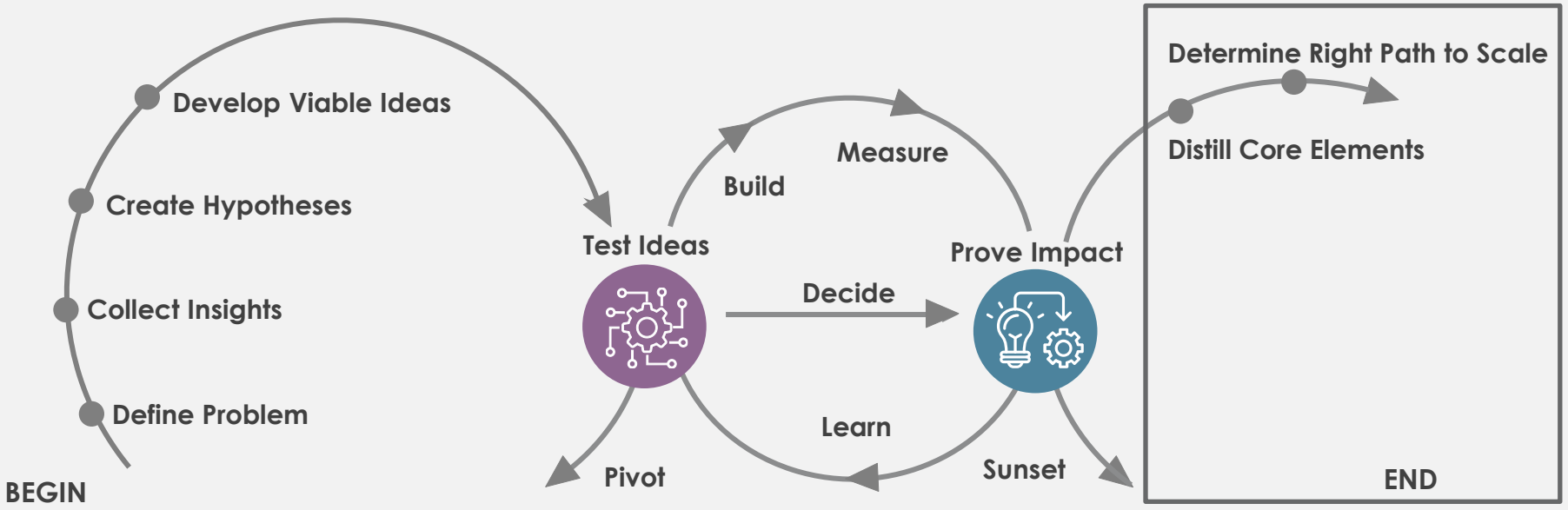
SOCIAL Alchemy: Scale



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PURPOSE

- Expand successful solutions to benefit more individuals
- Define how to best scale based on impact
- Understand what really matters among core elements

DO

- Use a logic model to distill the essential components of your enterprise that generate your results; fewer components = easier to replicate results

DON'T

- Scale without conducting a feasibility assessment on growth opportunities
- Assume that scale is only "bricks and mortar"

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What Do We Know About *Innovation*?

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What Do We Know about Innovation?

Myth: Innovation is about invention.

Reality: Innovation is about applying ideas in new, useful ways.

Myth: Innovation is driven by lone geniuses.

Reality: Innovation is a team sport built on collaboration.

Myth: Innovation requires unlimited resources.

Reality: Innovation thrives under constraints.

Myth: Innovation is too risky.

Reality: The bigger risk is failing to adapt and change.

Myth: Innovation is about technology.

Reality: Innovation is about solving problems better—people first, tools second.

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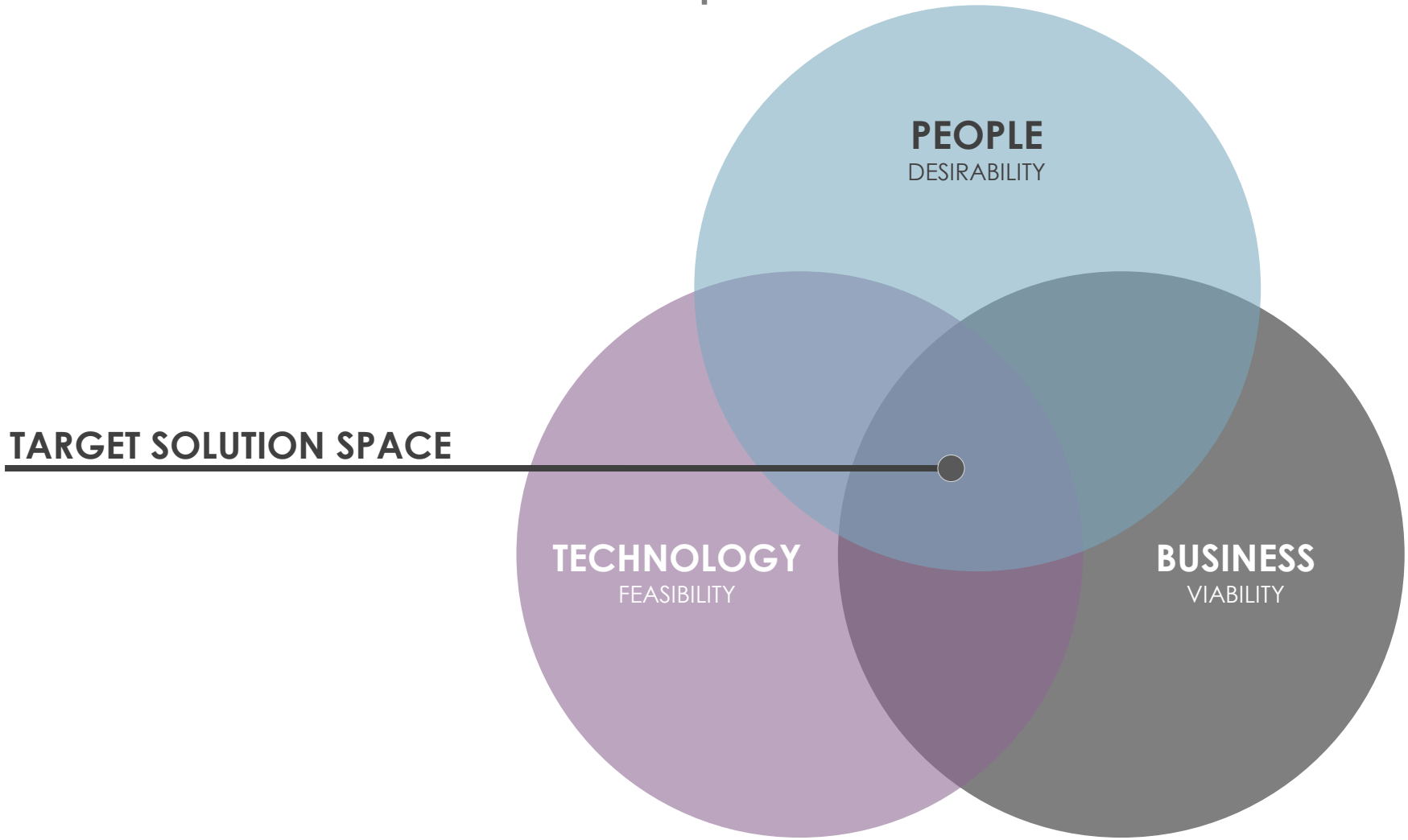
Innovation Sweet Spot



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MRI Machine

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MRI Machine for Children

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If we stop at the **surface**, we will only solve for the **surface**!

If we dig deeper to the **need**, we will be able to solve for the **need**!

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Key Takeaways

Creativity is for everyone

It's not a gift for a select few. With the right mindset, exercises, and play, we can all generate ideas.

Innovation is applied creativity

It's not about invention alone, but turning ideas into solutions that make a measurable difference.

Start with the problem, not the solution

True innovation (your "social alchemy") comes from deeply understanding the challenge before leaping to answers.

Constraints fuel breakthroughs

Limited resources and boundaries can spark smarter, more effective solutions.

Innovation is a team sport

Cultures that encourage collaboration, psychological safety, and iteration will thrive.

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Your journey matters – to your community, to this country, and to the future we are building together.

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SOCIAL TRENDSPOTTER

Latest Trends In The Social Sector

Our weekly blog, Social TrendSpotter provides you with the latest trends and ideas within the social sector. It merges current thinking with the edge of innovation to inspire, motivate and take action, so together we can create a better sector.

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Social TrendSpotter

Suzanne Smith, MBA

Founder & CEO,
Social Impact Architects

EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

- MBA, Duke University's Fuqua School of Business
  - Selected as CASE (Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship) Scholar
- Adjunct Professor – The University of Texas at Arlington

AWARDS & HONORS

- Best for the World Small Business Award, B Lab
- Top 10 Social Sector Blog, Huffington Post
- Next Generation Social Entrepreneurs Award, Social Enterprise Alliance
- Young ATHENA Award, Dallas Regional Chamber
- 40 Under 40 Award, Dallas Business Journal
- Women in Business Award, City of Dallas
- 2014 Collaboration of the Year, Workforce Solutions of Greater Dallas

COMMUNITY LEADER

- TEDx Speaker, "*Everyone Can be a Changemaker*"
- City of Dallas – Past Appointments to City of Dallas' Arts and Culture Commission, Library Board, Landmark Commission, Mayor's Task Force on Poverty, Mayor's Commission on Homelessness, South Dallas/Fair Park Trust (Vice Chair), Landmark Commission, and Board of Adjustment (Vice Chair)
- Member, Junior League, Leadership Dallas, Dallas Summit and Leadership North Texas

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Social TrendSpotter

About SOCIAL IMPACT ARCHITECTS

Social Impact Architects® is a social change agency that provides consulting and learning resources to changemakers, working alongside them to design creative and transformative solutions to social issues. SIA uses innovative, market-driven management tools to design cost-effective, pragmatic plans for our clients. We work collaboratively with our clients to ensure organizational ownership and improved capacity to sustain the solutions we help design.

CEO, Suzanne Smith, testifying at the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 2015.

About SIA

- Created in 2009 to bridge the divides in the creation of social solutions between governments, philanthropy, and nonprofits
- Established as a Benefit Corporation; received Best in the World from 2015-2019
- While headquartered in Dallas, Texas, the firm works across the country with clients large and small with a focus on the middle of the country
- Leverages a diverse virtual team with masters and doctorate degrees from across the country speaking multiple languages

Firm Expertise

- Authors ***Social TrendSpotter*** (@socialtrendspot), one of the sector's top blogs according to the *Huffington Post*. Known for its relatable way of blending important concepts and new ways of working with storytelling, ***Social TrendSpotter*** has been hailed by readers as "the only blog I read each week."
- ***Social Impact Architects*** has successfully contributed to system change and innovation projects at the local, state and national level. This process has been so successful that it was presented in 2015 at the U.S. Conference of Mayors as a best practice.
- ***Social Impact Architects*** serves in a number of advisory roles to government, including HHS's roundtable on social enterprise.

BLOG **socialimpactarchitects.com/blog**