

Innovation by Design Workshop Final Event Report

University of Northern British Columbia

January 25, 2024, 12:00 pm–3:30 pm

Facilitated by:

Dr. Katerina Standish, Vice Provost Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

Dr. Gabrielle Daoust, Assistant Professor, Global and International Studies

Student Participants:

Faezeh Mahdavisirazi, Gender Studies; Kelsey Millar, Social Work; Fatemeh Nouroozi, Natural Resources and Environmental Studies; Christiana Onabola, Health Sciences; Tyler Ringdahl, Psychology; Salima Somani, Health Sciences; Musfiq Tajwar, Global and International Studies

Workshop Activity 1. Introduction to Innovation

The workshop began with a presentation from Dr. Richard McAloney, Director of the Center for Technology Adoption for Aging in the North (CTAAN) to introduce the concept of innovation and provide examples of how innovation has led to advancements in technology for aging in northern and rural communities. This was followed by a brief question and answer period.

Workshop Activity 2. Guided question responses

Four teams of two participants were formed. Each team was given a packet of cue cards with pre-written responses (single words), in addition to several blank cards. Teams were given a question and asked to discuss and decide which 2-3 of the values on the cue cards they felt were the most important, or alternatively, write their own response on one of the blank cards.

Pre-written options: creativity, support, communication, relationships, compromise, novelty, clarity, environment, flexibility, stability, experience, tradition, history, money, resources.

Question 1: What are the core aspects of research?



Figure 1. Word cloud of participant responses to Question 1: What are the core aspects of research? Image generated by simplewordcloud.com.

Individual team responses:

1. stability, relationships, support
2. clarity, money, relationships
3. support, relationships
4. novelty, tradition, relationships

Key points from discussion:

- The importance of relationships was clear, both with the topic, with the student's advisor, and with stakeholders.
- The importance of financial support and support from supervisor for graduate students was highlighted.
- The importance of creating something new and adding to existing knowledge was discussed.
- It was felt that clarity is needed in research – if it is not clear what you are doing, you shouldn't be doing the research.

Question 2. What are the core aspects of innovation?



Figure 2. Word cloud of participant responses to Question 2: What are the core aspects of innovation? Image generated by *simplewordcloud.com*.

Individual team responses:

1. Flexibility, communication, creativity
2. Resources, creativity, implementation
3. Creativity, experience, communication
4. Creativity, relationships, communication

Key points from discussion:

- It was clear that creativity is key; to innovate, you need to be inventive and think outside the box.
- It was felt that communication of ideas was very important, both with those that will benefit from innovation to aid in its development and in marketing the innovation once developed.
- Resources (money and people) were also identified as being important.
- The importance of experience was discussed, both in conducting research and in working with communities to look at things through a different lens and to determine community priorities and needs.

Question 3. What do you need to be innovative?



Figure 3. Word cloud of participant responses to Question 3: What do you need to be innovative? Image generated by *simplewordcloud.com*.

Individual team responses:

1. Connection, clarity, support
2. Creativity, communication, flexibility, resilience
3. Time, trust, risk, curiosity
4. Support, experience, environment

Key points from discussion:

- Support was identified as key to be able to take ideas to a higher level, both from friends and family but also institutional support. The idea of privilege was discussed, as innovating can't happen without outside resources.
- Connection was seen as essential to build relationships and put all the pieces together.
- Communication was seen as necessary to bring together people with different backgrounds and attitudes and create a flexible approach that can move and shift as needs arise.
- Time was identified as important to being able to get creative, as well as to build trust, and the willingness to take risks.
- The importance of resilience and persistence was discussed.
- Curiosity and the openness to new ideas were identified as necessary to lead to creativity.

Workshop Activity 3. Open Discussion Questions.

Question 1. What does innovation mean in the context of your own discipline?

Key ideas discussed:

- Innovation is not just solving problems; a critical world view is necessary to see what has been done and what can be done better. The relevance to new demographics was seen as important.
- Communication and engagement in critical discourse in a meaningful way is required for innovation.
- A level of vulnerability and willingness to try and fail is required.
- A different skillset is required to generate knowledge vs. integrate and implement that knowledge to get knowledge and/or products into the hands of those that can use them.

- For art, creativity is the most important aspect; people aren't born with creativity, rather it is something that is built through time.
- People can get boxed in trying to standardize ways of doing things, which can stifle creativity. Creativity needs to be fostered.
- Creating value from ideas and products is creativity. Innovation can add value to things that already exist.
- Innovation in some fields is whatever moves the field ahead, for example by causing friction and starting conversation.
- Innovation will look very different depending on the level (micro, meso or macro). Innovation can be the connection between levels.
- Innovation looks very different from different perspectives. Context is important, for example, just bringing ideas from 'Global North' to 'Global South' and vice versa doesn't work. Ideas are needed for contextually relevant interventions.
- A starting point for innovation is knowledge of the world, questioning underlying assumptions, critical perspectives and reflections, well before product or implementation.

Question 2. How have your experiences as a grad student informed all of these reflections?

Key ideas discussed:

- More informal conversations are needed, which relate experiences to knowledge in the real world. Not a lot of reflective space built into more formal contexts.
- Barriers to innovation exist in institutions. Better infrastructure and opportunities are needed so students can more easily go and find out research gaps and engage with practitioners and other stakeholders.
- There are also barriers to generating knowledge, hoops that students need to jump through, for example barriers to publishing and getting knowledge used.

Question 3. Have there been spaces as a grad student where innovation is possible? What kind of barriers and obstacles exist?

Key ideas discussed:

- It was felt that students don't always have access to the information and connections to know what gaps exist. There is a lack of infrastructure and lack of engagement with and access to stakeholders. Students are asked to engage at different levels, but it is often not clear who to contact.
- The importance of background research in pursuing innovation was discussed.
- Discussions were had around the need to challenge those in power and the difficulties faced in doing so, as innovation can be disruptive and can challenge existing relations and systems of power.
- Larger systemic barriers were identified. For example, it was felt that it is difficult to operationalize master's research.
- In some fields, it was felt that innovation is an inherent part of doing research in the field, and that the arts, social sciences and humanities are already innovative. Innovation is already a part of the work.
- Lack of financial support and short timeframes to complete degrees for graduate students were seen as barriers for graduate students to pursue innovation.