LIFE CYCLES OF PUBLIC INNOVATION LABS

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(011)lab
CIDADE DE SÃO PAULO INOVAÇÃO E TECNOLOGIA
G•NOVA
Enap

SUMMARY

Presentation

INTO THE HEART AND THE CODE OF LABS

Guilherme Alberto Almeida de Almeida and Vitor Cipriano de Fazio

In August 2019, 81 individuals from ten countries, representing 43 institutions, spent a whole day discussing how public innovation labs are born, grow up, bear fruit, and perish. However, this type of organization still seems alien to many. This book is the result of intense and varied insights originated from the discussions held on that sunny day in São Paulo. But let's not jump ahead to the end of the story. Before starting it, we should better understand its actors, authors, its context and, of course, its plot.

The debate on public innovation is not new. It just takes up different forms, presenting itself under a different label or nomenclature according to the trends, politics and the main problems of the day. However, there is indeed a new element in this debate, for conversations regarding public innovation have now gained a new component with a clear tendency for the leading-role: the creation of units with a specific focus on public innovation, the so-called government innovation labs.

These labs are many things, but in general one can describe them as teams dedicated to experimenting and testing different ways of getting things done in government. This way of doing things typically involves co-creation (teaming up, either with colleagues or with users of a specific service), agility (a mix of practices familiar to technology teams, but with adepts outside this group), focus on the citizens (after all, it is for them that such labs exist), among other things.

Public innovation units have stirred curiosity in those working in government, partly due to their peculiar strategies and this open attitude, which stimulates frequent collaboration, partly due to the beautiful spaces some of them enjoy – although it is worth noting that having a beautiful space is not that important. In the end, labs draw attention because they renew public administration with practices that have become standard in other environments but are still rarely used in governments. Such practices stem from different areas in academia, the third sector, the private sector and disruptive technological environments. And they actually work! Maybe not right away, but that is also part of this book's story.

This publication seeks to dive deeper into the lab experience to obtain lessons, takeaways and insights. The book at times resembles a wildlife documentary (Where do they live? What do they eat? How do they reproduce?), with a touch of collective therapy session (Who are we? What do we want? What meaning do we seek?), mixed with academic reflections on public administration (as pointed out in its methodology). It also aspires to engage in a poetic experiment, employing a number of metaphors, metonyms, images and reoriented, resignified meanings, used to enhance the comprehension of the phenomenon and the discussions around it. Creating a thought-provoking and colorful mosaic of voices, approaches and methodologies, this narrative and its unconventional procedure seek to bring a dynamic vision to this story.

This work fills an important gap in studies

and practices related to public innovation in Brazil, and also in the wider discussion on this topic at a global level, mostly because the book provides a sort of first-person plural point of view on public innovation labs – in the sense that it offers a variety of personal accounts on the subject –, addressing dilemmas and proceedings, principles and conscience flow, values and realizations, achievements and – why not? – failures.

We believe it provides a key service organizing insights on experimentation in public administration and suggesting a series of healthy practices for knowledge management and innovation. One of the most recurrent weaknesses when dealing with public innovation is precisely the small amount of record of their particular practices, either in teams identified as practitioners (such as labs), or in the day-to-day activities of numerous undeclared public innovators, people who seek to transform reality based on observation and testing. This method of working, relying on tests, observation, and learning (and tests, observation and learning, and...) is dynamic, favoring action and informal annotations, thus neglecting records of deeper reflections in public documents. This work tries to "open the code" – and the heart – of labs for a wider audience.

This book only exists as it is because collaboration is a principle that guides public innovation. More specifically, the book is a flavorful fruit of the association between two labs: GNova, a federal public innovation lab managed by the Escola Nacional de Administração Pública (*National School of Public Administration*, Enap), a federal research, public innovation and civil servant formation center, and (011).lab, the public innovation lab managed by the Secretaria Municipal de Inovação e Tecnologia (*Innovation and Technology Secretariat*) from the city of São Paulo. This combination of the federal and the municipal level, the general and the specific, the wide shot and the close-up, the theoretical formulation and the territorial implementation, brings even more richness to the result.

Such richness is also reflected in the diversity of voices and participants that contributed to the debate that led to the making of this book. The gathering of different Latin American governments in this process of exchanging experiences, beyond physical and virtual barriers, results in a collective creation based on our own Latin American perspective, strengthening the international debate on government innovation.

In this spirit, we invite you to join us in this process. Grab a chair, pen and paper and bring your voice to the discussion as well!

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Vitor Cipriano de Fazio is the Coordinator of Innovation Platform and (011).lab at the Secretaria Municipal de Inovação e Tecnologia (Innovation and Technology Secretariat) of São Paulo.

Preface

PUBLIC INNOVATION: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Eduardo Staszowski

This preface begins on a sad note and under a sense of apprehension. At the moment this text is being written and this publication is being finalized, when whole sections of the global population are under lockdown, it is hard not to comment on the current crisis caused by COVID-19 – a crisis that has been exacerbated by growing precarity and increasing geographical and social inequalities and which has led directly to disproportionate loss of life in disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable communities. A predictable, and potentially manageable crisis has become a crisis of almost inconceivable scale and impact.

Where is the state in all of this? It is easy and fashionable to think about government with cynicism and distrust, to think that public service is synonymous with an outdated model and a legacy of inefficiencies. Instead, we argue that public service is more important than ever. Severe crises, such as the current pandemic, expose the fragility of our institutions, the limitations of the private sector and highlight the urgency of advancing a transition towards a fairer and sustainable world.

In this moment of disruption, we open a space for reflection on "public innovation labs," experimental spaces focused on the creation of solutions for public problems and their global spread. With a heuristic, multidisciplinary and unconventional approach to policy design the idea of public innovation labs gained much traction and attention in the last decade, bringing change in ways unseen before to how traditional government bureaucracies acted and operated with respect to exploring innovative responses to complex public issues.

However, there is a tension between the ideas of public innovation and the hegemonic political-economic context in which the labs were created. Operating within a model based on rational and pragmatic choices, they risk preserving rather than challenging historical conditions that perpetuate structural problems. This is especially true regarding issues such as racism and social inequality. Therefore a discussion on the life cycle of public innovation labs forces us to confront the political and philosophical questions inherent to this practice.

So, how should we proceed? We offer here a provocation. Instead of seeing innovation as identifying problems and setting up solutions that will not solve such problems in their essence, we should understand innovation as a political project. In order to foster hope for better days we need not only to create spaces for social innovation, but also for the renewal of public life as a whole. A public innovation lab should not be seen as a privileged protagonist authorized to innovate exclusively within limited parameters; rather, it should be seen as a fundamental player in defining citizenship as a mechanism for participation and construction of public life.

It is not sufficient to think of labs as an operational apparatus created to promote palliative actions within a predefined set of boundaries. In an alternative scenario, innovation should be comprehended as a *dispositif* of

disturbance to the status quo, an interruption of the neoliberal playbook and as a means to achieve progressive social change.

To ensure the longevity and legitimacy of the labs, it is crucial to reflect on the ways through which we understand the making of public policy and decision-making in a meaningful social and political process. This is also key to broaden the means of social participation, and acknowledge the public as active participants in these processes and not as passive subjects to be systematically studied. This translates into creating mechanisms that allow citizens and their communities to imagine different forms of society and become politically involved.

The International Government Innovation Conference that took place in Brazil in August 2019 was a landmark in developing a vision of what these processes and mechanisms might look like. Until then there had not been such an event outside of the north-north geopolitical context that promoted a debate free from a subordinate posture; one that invited the definition of a wider, post-colonial image of these practices, based on sensibilities and cultures unique to Latin America.

We had the opportunity to discuss governance models, particularly in public organizations, such as the Mário de Andrade library, in São Paulo, where the event took place. Libraries around the world are debating the evolution of their primary role as information repositories and learning spaces to become symbols and markers of a culture of inclusion in the communities where they are located, as well as a fundamental part of the public infrastructure. Libraries thus serve as an example of spaces that create new conditions for the development of social and human capital, where alliances and connections can be established in which different communities may meet and despite their differences, negotiate the terms of coexistence. The library presents itself both as an inspiring symbol and physical space for the renewal of public life — which is, ultimately, the final objective of public innovation labs.

The results of the important event and this publication must be used to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the public innovation approach, as well as to highlight models and lessons that may contribute to the construction of a movement for social and public innovation that is more open, solidary and democratic.

Eduardo Staszowski is a Professor and Director of the Parsons DESIS Lab at The New School, in New York.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, we witnessed a significant growth in the number of government innovation units, especially public innovation labs. A survey conducted in 2013 by the Parsons DESIS Lab, from New York, identified 16 labs around the world – none of which located in Latin America. In 2020, the website Apolitical registers about 123 innovation units, located in all continents, in governments with different political characteristics, in the national or local spheres of government, in the executive, legislative and judicial branches. In Brazil, a recent survey suggests that there are at least 40 innovation labs in all spheres of government (Sano, 2020).

This phenomenon includes labs that originated from civil society, frequently known as social innovation labs or citizen labs. Many different types of public innovation labs currently coexist. These originate both from social or state initiatives and are focused on a wide array of topics.

This publication is focused on the life cycle of innovation labs acting inside the realm of government, but it can also be of interest to other innovation labs operating in the public sphere. We also believe that these reflections might have implications for countless innovation units, strategies and teams which, while linked to governments across the globe as key players in the public innovation agenda, do not include the word "lab" in their name.

Public innovation labs appear in a context of broad transformations in modern society – transformations of social, technological and economic nature. Societies have now wider access to information, are more analytical, demand both rights and quicker, decisive responses from the government, requiring new forms of operation, which differ from what was created in the 18th century (alongside the bureaucracy of the Modern State).

There has been a change in perspective on public issues, with an evident distinction between complicated and complex problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973). The so-called complex public problems are not easily approachable, defy exclusive, definitive solutions and are highly connected to other problems, institutions, and actors.

Labs arise as an effort to deal with the uncertainties and complexity of public problems. Precisely for this reason, they enjoy a license to experiment, becoming, thus, quick learners who manage to create solutions based on trial and error. Their objective is to contribute to the creation of policies and services sensitive to the different needs of the people and mindful of the rights of the citizens. Labs are also known for broadening the scope of possible actions in terms of tools, solutions and, mainly, work methods that best operate in complex uncertain contexts. Labs set up precedents by adopting practices that, in many cases, challenge the existing structure and serve as an inspiration for civil servants with an innovative mindset, which can boost a change in culture in search of new approaches (Ferrarezi, Brandalise, Lemos, 2018). Taking in consideration the real experience of these labs and their methods of learning through actual engagement with society, public servants and political leaders might engage in processes leading to organizational and systemic change.

In the Latin American public innovation ecosystem, there is a coexistence of several teams with different approaches, organizational models, government positions and maturity levels. As innovation units develop, there is an increase in the search for guidelines, inspiration and insights from existing initiatives. International and civil society organizations join forces in suggesting agendas for innovation and State reform, and these suggestions are put forth by innovation units.

The authors of this publication, as many of you, are part of this group of professionals that drew inspiration from pioneers and sought to implement public innovation labs: (011).lab,

from the city of São Paulo, and GNova, from the Brazilian Federal Government. Our repertoire was frequently borrowed and adapted from countries in the global north, as it is the case with a good deal of articles, books, tools and references published in the past years. There is, therefore, an opportunity and a need to develop and disseminate knowledge on the specificities of the Latin American political and institutional context.

From this starting point, we began our research focusing on how labs are created and how they develop over time. Since discussions are still in their initial stages within academia, this project has a practical approach using research based on the reflections that came up in the experience of managers and public innovation teams.

We defined our objective as creating a qualified space for discussions and collective learning, motivating conversations, questions and reflections from those that work in these organizations, either in cities, regions or national governments, both from Brazilian and Latin American initiatives, with correspondents from all around the world.

The process to construct this collective learning space – further detailed in the methodology section – started from a structured exploration of a metaphor that had been informally used in conversations among public innovation units: the idea of a life cycle. Aside from being a stimulating topic, our hypothesis was that this metaphor could prompt the engagement of labs in different stages.

Guided by the question *How are public innovation labs born, how do they grow up and die?*, we gathered 81 professionals from ten countries to debate a lab's life cycle on August 8, 2019, during the *Encontro Internacional de Inovação em Governo*.

Each session in the convention was documented, so that the data collected could be used in this publication. Here we have assembled a few essays based on the reflections of the participants of the two panels and two workshops which took place on that occasion.

Our strategy was to enable exchanges among peers in which we could discuss the "innovation kitchen", as one participant has defined it. As a result, we avoided the logic of success stories, creating a safe space for stories filled with distress, doubt, mistakes, and the many crossroads that mark the different stages of a developing organization. The comparison of a lab's life to a human life allowed us to look at specific challenges faced by managers. This book is, thus, an invitation to follow up on the dialogue initiated at the convention, diving into the life cycle metaphor.

The methodology chapter describes the work process conducted, bringing in details on the outline of the research, the use of the metaphor and the synthesis of data and insights. We then dedicate three chapters to address each of the stages of a lab's life cycle, using a common structure: defining the life stage, the key topics of each stage and the challenges faced by the teams.

When addressing birth and childhood, we discuss a moment, rather frequent, in which decisions are not consciously taken by the parents and yet leave their marks – both in the lives of individuals and in the history of institutions. As with human beings, labs can be the result of a planned pregnancy, in a well-structured family, with a birth certificate and a clear mission... But this is not always the case. We also address childhood, a period of world exploration when first projects might be understood as tests conducted in a safer environment, or playful games where one gets to stumble and learn how to stand back up.

In the chapter dedicated to the teenage years, we address this stage of low stability, filled with self-doubt. A lot of what public innovation teams do is linked to questioning things as they are, asking unanswerable questions and saying things people are not willing to listen. Maybe for this reason it is a period in which identity crises and the feeling of not fitting in with the administration is so common; simultaneously, there is a good deal of experimentation, which at times takes place in secrecy, in the company of friends and support networks.

In time, the freshness of these early stages is followed by adulthood, the focus of our next chapter. Maturity is accompanied by self-knowledge, the sense of responsibility and serenity. This does not mean that crises cease to exist: now, mid-life crises arise, and one wonders whether the desired path is being followed and what has been given back to society. The path which has been travelled so far is a source of pride, but it takes courage to evaluate the lab's legacy and continue to create relevance. How to preserve the ability to transform ourselves in the face of the challenges that emerge in our context, as well as to take risks and try new things?

In the chapter on life challenges, we point out overall questions that permeate more than one life stage. With the imminent ending, the subject of death comes to mind, as well as our awareness of finitude. Although it follows us through our lifetime like a shadow, a hidden companion, it makes its appearances especially in times of fear, such as political transitions.

Although our focus is primarily on public innovation labs, we hope that reading this book will bring reflections on moments lived by other organizations, either with social or governmental origins. It is our desire to instigate dialogues on essential questions for the creation and strengthening of teams dedicated to public innovation. May this be an opportunity to direct our attention towards the development of organizations more conscious of their own life cycles.

METHODOLOGY

We, the authors, all work at government innovation labs. The research behind the elaboration of this book was thus conducted using some of the experimentation principles used by these very same labs. We looked for a context to interact with different practitioners studying these topics and develop new knowledge on these units, most of which are located in Latin America. During the exploratory stage of the research, we tested the hypothesis that the use of the life cycle metaphor could contribute to collective learning among public innovation labs.

At the same time, this is a thorough investigation on the work conducted in innovation labs and an essay on the life of these organizations. As an essay, it moves beyond the rationality of the research to adopt a poetic, provocative tone, enabled and justified by the choice of the metaphor as its central theme.

In the following sections, we describe the three moments of this research. We begin at the *exploration* moment, in which we explain how we arrived at the life cycle metaphor. We then present how the *use of the metaphor* allowed us to prompt discussions and reflections among professionals in innovation labs at workshops and discussion panels. Lastly, we describe how we organized and analyzed the *data and insights* obtained in the conversations that resulted in this book.

Group discussions during one of the sessions conducted at the Mário de Andrade library.

EXPLORATION

Our journey began in a workshop with representatives from government innovation labs organized by GNova and (011).lab, during the 4th Semana de Inovação (*Innovation Week*)[1], in November 2018, in Brasília. At that event, we identified the challenge of bringing teams currently in different development stages to take part in the same conversation.

The insights obtained on that occasion led us to plan a second meeting, to take place in the city of São Paulo. During the preparation for this next gathering, we conducted a series of interviews with researchers, consultants, and government innovation teams[2], in which we collected ideas on how to deal with the challenges we had previously identified.

Based on these initial interviews, and aware of the ongoing debates in the international government innovation community about the disbanding of labs, we identified the hypothesis that the life cycle metaphor could create a favorable context for collective learning. In the following interviews, we tested the reactions of the interviewees to the idea of the life cycle stages and outlined the basis for using this metaphor as a central theme for the upcoming event. As a result, the methodological premises that would guide the project were thus defined.

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1. Semanas de Inovação (*Innovation Weeks*) have occurred annually since 2015, and are the largest public innovation event in Brazil, gathering several debaters and speakers, as well as thousands of participants in a wide range of discussions on government innovation. The event is organized by the Enap, along with the Federal Court of Audits (TCU) and the Ministry of Economy.

2. The (011).lab team interviewed: Mark Hallerberg (Hertie School, Germany), Isabella Brandalise (former MindLab and GNova), Jorge Lagarto (LabX, Portugal), Javier Guillot (former-DNP, Colombia), Juan Felipe López (former Laboratório de Gobierno, Chile) and GNova (Manuel Bonduki, Marizaura Camões, Fernanda Machiaveli and Elisabete Ferrarezi).

METHODOLOGICAL PREMISES

1. Association with the human life cycle. We sought to engage individuals to tell stories connected to the life of their own labs, based on their personal experiences. Further, by referring to the stages of human life, we made it easier for the participants to establish a common understanding during the workshops and to organize their data and insights.

2. Participants from similar backgrounds and languages. To ensure a better understanding among participants during the following stage, we established that most guests in the event would be Spanish and Portuguese speakers[3]. This premise invested in the proximity of individuals to foster conversations, as attendants came from more or less similar institutional backgrounds.

3. It is not about classifying labs. This premise guided the research staff during the application of the life cycle metaphor, avoiding the temptation to classify labs according to their lifetime. It also served as a guide for participants, who were provoked to thoroughly analyze their labs, regardless of the stage declared during data collection.

4. Inserting this research into a larger event. The fourth and last premise was key to create a proper context for a government innovation event that would discuss a number of subjects other than innovation labs. With this in mind, we sought to bring wider public sector innovation topics to our discussions.

Once the premises were outlined, we designed panels and workshops on the *life cycles of public innovation labs*, which were a part of the *Encontro Internacional de Inovação em Governo*, organized by (011).lab, which occurred from the 7th to 9th of August, 2019.

Following the metaphor as a guide for preparing the sessions, the project team interacted virtually throughout the months that led to the event, in order to outline and specify the stages – *birth and childhood, teenage years, adulthood and maturity.* We prepared a set of questions in order to identify specific themes that would characterize each of these stages, and these became the starting points for our discussions. Lastly, we singled out the *main challenges* of each stage to better understand how teams dealt with the difficulties faced throughout the existence of their lab, as well as to point out critical transitions.

3. Only one lab did not fit into this profile (specifically a lab from Canada). To assess this issue, we hired an interpreter to accompany the two Canadian participants.

TOPICS OF THE
STAGES OF A LAB'S
LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

What does it mean to be a lab in its childhood?

Pregnancy. Was it planned? Why create a government innovation lab? For what reason? How was the planning process for the creation? And how was the lab's team formed?

Parenthood. Who are the parents of the lab? Who are its sponsors? How is the relationship with the institutions in which the lab was created? What do these institutions expect from the lab?

Formalization. Does it have a birth certificate? Are there documents formalizing the foundation of the lab? Which documents are these? Why did the institutions decide to validade the lab? How was the name of the lab chosen?

First words. Do you remember the first definition of the ultimate goal of the lab? How did its first project come up? Was there any support for its development? How did other actors react to the initial narratives of the lab?

TEENAGE YEARS

What does it mean to be a lab in its teenage years?

Defiance and unease. How to say "no"? How to carve its own space? How to obtain resources? How to balance the wishes of sponsors with the objectives of the lab?

Identity crisis. What is the organizational role of a lab? What are the opportunities of implementing change in the trajectory of a lab? How is it seen by the workers of the institution? How about external workers, and other directors?

Friends and tribes. How to explore possible lines of action for a lab? To which groups does a lab pertain? How is it seen by others (labs, partners, and citizens)? Is there only one way of being a lab?

ADULTHOOD AND MATURITY

What does it mean to be a lab in its adulthood and maturity?

Memory. Are there any efforts towards documenting and evaluating projects and work processes in the lab? Which mistakes allowed for maturation or changes to the lab's direction?

Legacy. What will be the legacy of the lab after its death? How is this legacy spread? What happens after the death of a lab? How is the lab seen by the community? Does it become a myth?

Longevity. What are the strategies used by the laboratories that managed to overcome major changes?

Reincarnation. Being successful means ceasing to exist? Or is the innovation agenda endless? Is a lab necessary for there to be innovation?

Participants during the session dedicated to labs' teenage years.

USE OF THE METAPHOR

Four sessions – all stemming from the question *How are innovation labs born, and how do they grow up and die?* – took place on August 8, 2019, at the Mário de Andrade library, in the city of São Paulo, as part of the *Encontro Internacional de Inovação em Governo*. This included two workshops and two discussion panels, with public authorities, researchers and representatives from the civil society and international organizations.

How are innovation labs born, and how do they grow up and die?

Beginning of the sessions, in which the teams of (011).lab and GNova welcome participants at the gardens of the Mário de Andrade library.

SUMMARY OF
THE SESSIONS

1. Birth and childhood

In order to start our discussion, we explored a number of questions related to the creation of a lab. Participants gathered in four quadrants, each working with specific topics regarding birth and childhood. Each quadrant received guest labs that shared their perspectives, based on particular prompts. There were also two rounds of interactions between participants and guests, which led to new questions and discussions.

2. Teenage years

After a lunch break, we resumed our discussion, now focusing on the beginning of the development of a lab. This session revolved around three main topics and was based on the content of letters previously sent by guest labs. We motivated labs to recall and reflect on the instabilities and challenges that characterize a lab in its teenage years.

3. Adulthood and maturity

In this panel, participants discussed a period of greater stability of a lab, connected to adulthood. Based on the stories of five guest speakers, discussions concerned the way labs see themselves and the characteristic challenges of this stage. Besides questions by the moderators, the panel also included questions from the audience members.

4. Overall reflections on the life cycle

To finish the agenda, we invited a researcher, a consultant, and the former director of a government innovation lab to reflect on each of the previous sections and recap the discussions. We attempted to explore specific aspects of each of the stages, as well as overall topics that emerged due to the use of the metaphor.

In total, 81 individuals representing 43 public innovation units from 10 different countries (including Brazil) took part in the workshops. Following a methodological guideline, the background of the participants was diverse, with members of public innovation labs, members of the public sector (who were interested in establishing a lab in their own organization), researchers, consultants, and international organization representatives. With a focus on strengthening connections and creating collective learning environments in Latin America, the international participants were invited by the *Encontro Internacional de Inovação em Governo*, while the other participants signed up on the day of the event.

GUEST PARTICIPANTS

PRESENT AT THE EVENT	COUNTRY
Ana Ruth Villarreal, Casa Presidencial de Costa Rica	Costa Rica
Aura Cifuentes, Equipo de Innovación Pública, Departamento Nacional de Planeación	Colombia
Bruno Monteiro, LabX – Laboratório de Experimentação da Administração Pública	Portugal
Carolina Sciarotta, Pátio Digital	Brazil
Diego Gismondi, Santalab	Argentina
Eduardo Staszowski, Parsons DESIS Lab	Brazil / USA
Fernando Nogueira, MobiLab+	Brazil
Juan Felipe López Egaña, former Laboratorio de Gobierno	Chile
Malena Temerlin, LABgobar – Laboratorio de Gobierno de Argentina	Argentina
Marcela Ambrosini, MVDLab – Laboratorio de Innovación Ciudadana de Montevideo	Uruguay
Maria Alejandra Llosa, former member of the +51LAB	Peru
Marjolaine Saint Arnaud, Laboratoire d'Innovation Urbaine de Montréal	Canada
Paola Coral, CISNA – Centro de Innovación Social de Nariño	Colombia
Roman Yosif, Laboratorio de Gobierno	Chile
Santiago Amador, Laboratorio de Innovación en Servicios Públicos de Bogotá	Colombia

CORRESPONDENTS	CITY
Alex Ryan and Claire Buré, MaRS Solutions Lab	Toronto
Chelsea Mauldin, Public Policy Lab	New York
Diego Galante, Mentes Creativas	Buenos Aires
Giulio Quaggiotto, UNDP Regional Innovation Center	Bangkok
Juan Felipe Yepes, LabCapital	Bogota
Lars Elmgreen, former MindLab	Copenhagen
Mari Nakano, NYC Civic Service Design Studio	New York
Sabine Junginger, GovLab Austria and former MindLab	Berlin

One of the participants registering the outcomes of conversations during the session on birth and childhood.

One of the groups during the birth and childhood session.

Real-time registry and synthesis of the conversations on each group.

Panel on labs' adulthood and maturity, at the auditorium of the Mário de Andrade library.

ACTIVITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION TEAM

To conduct the activities outlined we had a team composed by members of the (011).lab, GNova and student volunteers, with different roles and responsibilities, ranging from production, documentation and data organization.

Facilitation
Mediate the activities, offering prompts, answering questions, keeping time, communicating with teams and generating time and prompt synchrony.

Production
The production team was in charge of setting up the venue and the event's layout, guaranteeing the provision of food and water, as well as other logistics matters connected to the workshops, all essential to ensure a great experience for the participants.

Documentation
Each session had representatives responsible for taking notes and organizing the consolidated results after the workshop.

Case sharing and reflection
The birth and childhood workshop received four guests, who shared stories about their own lab. The adulthood workshop received five guests and the overall reflections panel received three guests.

Foreign correspondents
The teenage years workshop received members and former members of public innovation labs, who shared their stories through letters. A total of eight letters were shared.

Synthesis
WIth the end of the data collection process, the authors became responsible for organizing and analyzing data, with the objective of communicating results and insights.

Participants gathered at the auditorium at the end of the last session on labs conducted during the *Encontro Internacional de Inovação em Governo*.

DATA AND INSIGHTS ORGANIZATION

This process obtained a significant amount of information, available at the Enap repository[4] and analyzed in this book. In each of the sessions conducted, two types of data were collected: (i) the data generated by the participants themselves, and (ii) the data generated by guests, either in lectures or in texts prepared before, during and after the workshops. By the end of the events, our team catalogued the data.

With the information organized by data type and stage of the life cycle, our team began the coding moment of the process. This consisted in transcribing the audio recorded, inserting these transcriptions into a qualitative data analysis software and creating categories that facilitated analysis.

We developed codes based on the questions and topics mentioned, such as: *#3. Memory, #1. Was the pregnancy planned?, #2. Friends and tribes, #3. What does it mean to be a lab in its adulthood?*. This division of the information made it possible to organize the answers to questions concerning the life cycle of public innovation labs. The use of keywords – created freely by our synthesis team – led us to a second form of codification, which thus allowed for the inclusion of new topics that emerged during the convention.

With this categorization, we identified patterns in the answers of each group and conducted an analysis on each stage of the life cycle. Although originated from inputs provided by participants, the analysis was coupled with the authors' reflections on their own work experiences in public innovation labs combined with the collected data, as well as existing literature on the topic.

4. The data collected includes: the birth and childhood panel (56 minutes of audio), the teenage years panel (6 minutes of audio and 8 letters), the adulthood and maturity panel (105 minutes of audio) and the overall reflections panel (45 minutes). These are available for consultation at the Enap repository, at *https://repositorio.enap.gov.br/handle/1/5000*

Photo: Marina Lins Lacerda

Ciclos de Vida dos Laboratórios de Inovação panel, during the 5th Semana de Inovação, in November 2019.

By incorporating different perspectives on the available data, we managed to improve the quality of the analysis on each stage of the life cycle. Based on this material, the team presented its preliminary results in the *Ciclos de Vida dos Laboratórios de Inovação* panel, during the 5th Semana de Inovação (*Innovation Week*), in Brasília (2019).

Other rounds of interactions also took place following this presentation, which enabled us to deepen our analysis on each of the stages. We then arranged ourselves in pairs to write a first draft of the chapters, collected suggestions, organized the main findings and refined our descriptions of each of the stages and of the use of the metaphor.

We then reached the final draft of the following chapters, which discuss birth, childhood, teenage years, adulthood and maturity in public innovation labs, the challenges of life and, lastly, an epilogue on death.

Vivendo, se aprende; mas o que se aprende, mais, é só fazer outras maiores perguntas.

João Guimarães Rosa
Grande sertão: veredas

We learn by living, but what we learn the most is to just ask bigger questions.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Everywhere we look in the public administration there are pregnant institutions and teams, newborn babies and children inventing new games. Public innovation labs are going through a baby boom. In national or local governments, at the executive, legislative or judicial branch of government, the creation of innovation units calling themselves labs is increasingly more frequent. In addition to these newborn labs there are many others in a stage of pregnancy or already in operation – even if in lesser degrees of institutionalization. There are still others living in the minds of their parents. Many are in their very first moments, enjoying the delights and distress of their birth and childhood. This first stage in a lab's life was also our first dive into our metaphor..

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A BABY LAB?

The birth is the inaugural moment of existence, a moment of great power, full of possibilities, toil and dreams for the parents and expectations for the community surrounding the baby. It is also a moment that demands specific care, in which the basic structure that leads to a healthy and fulfilling childhood is formed.

During childhood there are great physical and psychological developments, marked by body growth and gradual behavioral changes, as well as the establishment of the basis for a personality. Playing games is the main activity at this stage, as it stimulates intelligence, motor skills and several other aspects connected to a full development. Regarding labs, one might say that they are starting to understand themselves and grow through their first activities, which typically have a more exploratory character, looking around for possibilities.

We structured our discussion on the conception, birth and childhood of public innovation labs based on the following topics: *conception and pregnancy, parenthood, first steps and words*.

CONCEPTION AND PREGNANCY

Each lab is created in a specific context, with its own specific reasons. During the workshop conducted at the *Encontro Internacional de Inovação em Governo* we received straightforward answers to the prompt *Was the pregnancy planned?*, including a reply given by Diego Gismondi (2019), from Santalab of the Santa Fe province, Argentina, who claimed: "Yes, we planned it, there was a need to gather a few loose topics". We also became aware of a clear case of an unplanned pregnancy: the Peruvian federal government was creating a delivery unit and seized the opportunity to also create a public innovation lab under the same structure (although recognizing that the goals of a delivery unit are often antagonistic to those of a lab, particularly when it comes to quick deliveries of previously determined products).

The prenatal period is filled with uncertainty and insecurity for the parents, who frequently seek support to plan the upcoming change with more experienced people, who hold this specific knowledge. In a lab's life cycle, teams frequently seek mentorship from existing labs or look to prepare themselves for new duties through capacitation processes. There is a general understanding that the work of a new unit will require a set of specific skills, and the lab's prenatal stage is also a preparation period for this.

Just like parents put a lot of effort preparing the perfect room for their baby, in many labs the creation of a physical space plays a key role in materializing the transformations a lab aspires to. The lab's space is a meeting room not only for its employees but for all the people somehow involved in the projects and activities developed by the lab. And, as the birth of a child brings a family together, the creation of labs can indeed bring together a group of public servants who feel the need to promote innovative practices and who see, in the foundation and in the physical space of the lab, a favorable context to meet other people with the same purposes and concerns, as well as discussing, planning and executing projects. Thus, the newborn lab can function as a meeting place for previously separate individuals. In the workshop, Gismondi (2019) claimed that labs can operate as a hub not only for people, but for a wide range of topics that seem to hover loosely, with no precise place within the government structure (such as matters revolving around open data, civic engagement etc.).

The creation process of these units is usually connected to a bundle of expectations – in many cases, quite obscure – in relation to the role that the lab will play within the organization. In the first steps following their birth, labs are significantly attached to the narrative of its creation and to that bundle of expectations that surrounds the newborn unit. Therefore, it is relevant to ask: *what are these expectations? Why was this particular lab created?* In its first moments of existence, the baby lab is faced with the challenge of putting to practice the claims of its origin story, striving (or not) to meet the expectations set upon it, which mainly stem from its parents or sponsors.

"Like a newborn, a lab at this stage doesn't really know what it is quite yet. It needs the support of experts in the public arena and the endorsement of those inside the administration to let it figure things out. It needs room to understand how to couple its strengths and skill sets with the priorities of the respective government/ public-sector 'mothership', but it also has to understand this and learn to stand up very quickly."

Mari Nakano (2019), NYC Civic Service Design Studio

PARENTHOOD

Who are the parents of a lab? One could say that the parents are those who ensure its survival – the sponsors, or maybe the institution in which the lab is lodged. Or, perhaps, the actual team that implements it. In our parenthood discussions with labs from around the world, the answer to this question frequently referenced a joint effort between political leaders and entrepreneurial public servants – teams originated from within the government bureaucracy which were engaged in the creation of a lab. In these cases, the lab would have, as a fundamental aspect of its implementation, the political support from managers of the institution and would be conceived and managed by teams of public servants.

There were several references to this joint effort: one of the groups noted that labs stem from a "polyamorous" relation between public servants and political leaders; a different group claimed that labs originate from the union of politicians who also are "pioneer entrepreneurs" within a favorable context. Many labs emphasized that the relationship between a lab and its directors – sometimes referred to as parents, sometimes as obstetricians – is highly important.

An initial conflict linked to a lab's origin – which will remain as an issue at least until its teenage years – came up in our discussions: the dilemma between being agile enough in delivering results, in alignment with the expectations of political leaders, and the need for a timeline that actually allows for exploratory, experimental projects. The lab is born as the "son of a controlling mother and a hippie father" and needs to be able to balance what must be meticulously planned and what might be incrementally built during the development of the lab.

By its definition, a lab brings innovation and highlights opportunities for ruptures in the status quo. As a space for exception, which creates different strategies and fosters a counterculture to what is already established, a lab depends on sponsors in order to exist, and yet cannot submit completely to its sponsor. The ability to say "no" and establish its own priorities, work methods and partnerships – which will be key during its teenage years – is present since the lab's birth.

At this stage, the existence of a lab is in itself a rupture, as it represents a new structure that is born with the objective of innovating and supporting public innovation. Although the visions of innovation that support the founding of a laboratory are varied in nature, it is clear that parents, sponsors, and the organization responsible for the lab are seeking to boost their transformation capabilities. Therefore, from the very beginning, there will be this expectation and this understanding that the lab will act as an agent of instability and transformation. However, it still relies on its parents to exist. How and when will the lab's umbilical cord break, and when will it adopt its own identity, different from the organizational culture of its parent-organization? How does a lab become different without being isolated within the organization, but promoting a new, inclusive culture?

FIRST STEPS AND WORDS

A lab's liberties and limits may be reflected in the extent to which it is institutionalized. With the objective of gaining insights on the institutional instruments used for implementing a lab in the spheres of law and bureaucracy, as well as motivating discussions on the consequences of being more formal or not, we offered the following prompt: *does the lab have a birth certificate?*

The existence of a formal instrument – such as an entry in the Official Gazette – defining a physical space, institutional activities, budget etc. can be a safeguard for the lab in the face of political changes that will, sooner or later, emerge. However, these mechanisms can lead to excessive bureaucracy, consuming a relevant portion of human resources in the lab's early stages, as well as obstructing potential future attributions. Nevertheless, some groups highlighted the importance of formalization in the founding of their labs, claiming that institutionalization brought legitimacy to the lab. Overall, the more unstable the political environment, the more important formalization seems to be.

Roman Yosif (2019), one of the participants of the workshops and director at Laboratorio de Gobierno, Chile, declared that a lab's birth certificate would not be the legal fact of its creation; instead, the first projects conducted by the lab and the results it obtained would play this part. The role of these first steps – or first words – is, indeed, highly relevant for a lab's history. As expectations related to the term "innovation lab" are quite vague at times, it is through practice, expressed in actions and projects, that the identity card of a lab begins to be recognized.

In initial stages, the political sponsorship for the lab is explicit, and its birth, the very existence of the lab, provides its legitimacy. This situation gives a little bit of room for experimentation and for projects that might test the boundaries of the unit – much like a child playing freely and getting dirty. The first projects and also the narratives produced by the lab at this early stage end up fomenting possibilities in the future and amplifying the support for the organization. Nevertheless, it can also lead to stigmas regarding its actual attributions. The institutional culture tends to seek self-preservation and, if it feels threatened, it might take advantage of some aspects of those first steps and narratives in order to challenge the capacity of the lab for producing results or meeting sponsor's expectations.

It is in this mix of expectations from sponsors, involvement from public servants that will lead the lab in its first projects and the structuring of an unique identity (separate from the parent-organization's identity) that lie the fundamental elements for this stage of the lab's life.

BIRTH CHALLENGES

We understand that some of the main challenges in the moment of birth are related to the lab's relationship with its parents or sponsors and with the community surrounding it. This entails an intrinsic contradiction: the lab, recently implemented to produce new strategies, strongly depends on institutional support to structure itself as a transforming force.

The sponsor's expectation is that the lab will develop itself very quickly, even skipping the childish stage dedicated to playful games, tests and discoveries, soon reaching the stage when it delivers actual results.

As written by Mari Nakano (2019), the first moments of a lab are much more comparable to those of a newborn deer, which has to stand up right away and walk, than to those of a human being, who must always take some time before taking its first solid steps.

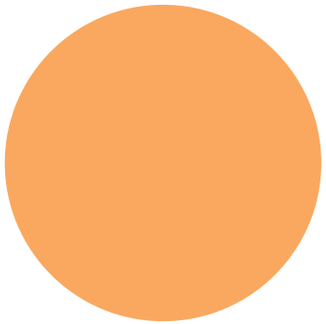
Hovering upon the teams that manage the lab – the hippy parents –, there is the challenge of gathering a group of people properly equipped with the specific skills for its projects, be it through recruiting, investing in skill development or by making use of alternative, flexible work methods to create and engage a network of people connected to the newborn lab. In this case, it is a challenge to implement a productive partner relationship with other teams at the institution without being co-opted by the organizational culture in effect, nor seeming too threatening to it.

Lastly, it is likely that the main challenge of the lab will be to conduct its first projects in such a way that ensures legitimacy in relation both to its sponsors and the institution in which it is lodged, as well as to the other teams that might be interested in the lab as a potential partner. Further, the challenge lies in grounding this legitimacy on a unique identity, albeit not totally defined, from which the lab may develop the following stages of its life with autonomy. This is what will actually guide the lab to face the (countless) challenges to come during its teenage years.

TEENAGE YEARS

We explored public innovation labs' teenage years in two situations. Firstly, we invited researchers on the topic and members of innovation units from several different countries to reflect on this particular stage in the life of a lab. Answers were sent as letters addressed to the workshop participants. This led to our second moment of exploration for this stage: participants used the letters as a starting point for conversations throughout the sessions.

Overall, there is no clarity regarding the moment when a lab stops being a child and moves on to its teenage years. However, the identification between the teenage stage and the very nature of labs is evident, as detailed next.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A TEENAGE LAB?

For people and innovation labs, the teenage years are a time for questions, discoveries, dramas, turbulences, contradictions, crises, and instabilities. It is not easy, but being a teenager is also fascinating.

In terms of age, the teenage years correspond to the transition from childhood to adulthood. Aside from characterizing itself by physical, mental, and social changes for a human being, this is a period that entails a distancing from the behavior and privileges associated with children and the acquisition of some of the competencies and responsibilities assigned to adults. Parents also begin to expect teenagers to follow some behaviors outlined in their childhood. Naturally, breaking these expectations can lead to tension and conflicts, this time more serious (and dramatic) than childhood quarrels.

Beyond age, the teenage years also mean bringing a specific attitude that permeates many stages of life; it can be coupled with the idea of youth, in reference to energy, vigor, enthusiasm, openness, freshness and intensity.

To explore the teenage tears of innovation labs, we organized reflections in three macro-themes: *friends and tribes, identity crisis and defiance and unease*. The following text is filled with excerpts from letters sent by researchers and members of public innovation labs around the world on this transformative stage of life. Being part of a teenage lab ourselves, and in keeping with the restless spirit of youth, we conducted these sessions with very few certainties and a good deal of doubt.

"[In teenage years] you start asking yourself some deep questions: moving away from toolkits and methods, and thinking about purpose: are all the initiatives we started really changing the culture of the organization?"

Giulio Quaggiotto (2019), UNDP Regional Innovation Center

FRIENDS AND TRIBES

Just as teenagers enjoy spending time with one another, public innovation labs, over the course of their teenage years, learn a lot with their peers. They tend to have a knack for identifying people with a similar mindset within the administration, devising ways to "hack" bureaucracy as well. Step by step, the individual (and isolated) heroes of an organization begin to become part of a community, acquiring a shared sense of purpose. With each cup of coffee, they build a network of partners and friends, including people who their parents, in many cases, never even heard of.

Teenagers also go about the world looking for references for their existence. They do this sometimes obsessively, not resting until everything about the life of their idols is known, constantly asking questions, such as: *How did they do it in the Danish lab? What about the Mexican lab?* In their effort to fit in a specific group and reproduce behaviors, a lab frequently ends up following stereotypes of what a relevant lab should be. It, then, tries hard to fit in this identified behavior, even though they do not really know their true identity. Sometimes, a lab does everything it can to differentiate itself from its parents and family members, even unconsciously, or at the very least avoiding deeper reflection on its actions.

It is a period full of discoveries and tests. Friends show them a new music video "everyone" is watching, and the teenager becomes obstinate in learning its lyrics and choreography. Comparatively, a lab sometimes makes a lot of effort in creating situations so as to test a methodology used by a different lab, which it is certain that will also work in its own context. However, this methodology might not be perfectly applicable in a different scenario, and does not turn out as successful as expected.

Quite frequently the image that a lab has of itself does not correspond to that which others have of it. The teenager is seen by younger labs as a source of inspiration, like the older cousin is seen by the younger cousins. By its managers, however, the lab might be seen as a rebel, a son that tends to slam doors and throw tantrums when upset. Meanwhile, citizens do not clearly understand what "this new thing that looks like a *startup*" is.

Fellow public servants may see the lab as the "owner" of innovation, but also as a foreign agent with a particular and hardly understandable language. The language aspect deserves special attention. During childhood, once words appear, parents, uncles, and all of those around make efforts to understand the meaning of those initial grunts and sounds. During the teenage years, however, a large number of slang words come up (lots of them in English!) as a form of establishing an identity, and the lab risks distancing itself from its neighbors and sponsors, who are not so willing to try to understand something that, in their eyes, looks more like a game.

"Teenage years are the puzzling, formative years. Here you are trying hard to find your place in the world, your way of fitting in – even if that way implies a punk, counterculture element, or high level intellectual reflections on the purpose of public sector innovation, or a proactive doer attitude towards development through collaboration."

Lars Elmgreen (2019), former MindLab

IDENTITY CRISIS

In the teenage years, labs develop and mature their theory of innovation while working on projects. In other words, they change tires while driving the car.

"In childhood, a lab is learning to walk and speak and play with others. Engaging in the work at all feels like an achievement. In adolescence, more is required; the unconscious pleasure of getting things done gets complicated by efforts at self-analysis and self--transformation."

Chelsea Mauldin (2019), Public Policy Lab

Identity crises can happen when a lab is formally created before experimenting with its possible identities. Therefore, it may have a confusing identity, with different understandings inside and outside the lab, generating infinite subsequent discussions on this topic. This is also reflected in the difficulty of defining its brand and visual identity – as a teenager who spends more time choosing its outfit than actually wearing it.

The teenage years are a stage of construction, the formative period of the lab, in which it begins to make its own choices and to differentiate itself. Parents have increasingly less power over it and wait for a balance between duty and leisure. The teenager must, therefore, prove to be capable of taking responsibility. It seeks to use any sort of small achievements or quick results to meet its parents' expectations. This may occur through an initial project portfolio, more

structured processes, financial management or even international awards. The lab needs to show why it was created. As noted by Sabine Junginger (2019), former MindLab, from Denmark, and GovLab, from Austria:

"Adolescence then, in my mind, would start kind of when the 'pocket money provided by the parents' dries up or begins to involve demonstrating that one has earned it. Once again, the US OPM Lab comes to my mind, which is now more or less self-funded. To do so, a lab has to demonstrate real value and real relevance in its respective context. It is a phase where the lab has to be ready to juggle the bureaucratic demands, the political constraints, the organizational aspects, including HR and its own propositions ".

"As opposed to infancy, we have a better grasp of what is right and wrong and can articulate ourselves much better. This is when we can start to develop a clearer definition of our mission, vision, goals and priorities". Mari Nakano (2019), NYC Civic Service Design Studio, from the United States.

The world of the teenager is their bedroom, a safe space for all their mess and experimentation. It is, however, a limited space, and the mess cannot spread to the whole house – there are places which require seriousness, such as the living room and the office. Other spaces, like the garage, are not recognized as part of the house by its inhabitants, but as an external, open, independent room. What would the limit be between a lab and its organization? Is there any permeability between the two?

And how is this family? Frequently, it is during the teenage years that we discover some inconvenient truths about being a lab, or that your family is, as a matter of fact, a dysfunctional institution. Once we start to occupy spaces outside our own bedroom with more confidence and to listen to the conversations around the dinner table, some convictions that we have held since childhood start to be questioned. Moreover, when dealing with a government that frequently changes, it becomes quite difficult to determine who your parents really are. Could it be that each day a different mother and father show up?

DEFIANCE AND UNEASE

The teenage lab gains its first scars when it tries to change its organization too fast and bumps into obstacles. Defiance with a little bit of naivety. The lab thinks it can solve anything and that others do not understand it, including its parents, sponsors, and colleagues.

"The incorporation of flexible methodologies to cumbersome structures is always a challenge. I think the teenage years of a lab entails a moment when the lab still represents a bother to the big processes. They are inconvenient because they continue to dispute processes that should be modified, although the need to incorporate the labs to the official structure has already been established."

Diego Galante (2019), Mentes Creativas

At this transition stage, the teenager feels like an adult, tries to appear as articulate as an adult, but is not perceived as such. It wants to be in the places where important topics are discussed, but its access is still not allowed, as in a meeting behind closed doors at the office. Its presence still bothers, being seen as inappropriate, sometimes excessively provocative. When it wishes to negotiate its entry, either through the use of force or by other forms of persuasion, it is usually allowed to only observe. In spite of the urge to speak, the lab may use this listening, "neutral" position to better understand its context and identify opportunities that might be hidden, listening both to managers and to those at the forefront of the service, be it in the toy room or in the kitchen.

The "no" is a big problem for teenagers – both to comply with it and to say it. Frequently, all they want is to set their limits with a resounding "no". But eventually they learn that sometimes it is better not to ask questions when you do not want to hear their real answers. Other times, they know they will have to obey and that it is not always that they can reach a compromise with their parents. For a lab, saying "no" can help define a clear agenda – which is not always the case for this moment of self-discovery. The teenager ends up doing things behind their parents' backs, asking for forgiveness, not for permission. In other cases, they learn new rhetorical strategies, using expressions like "not now", "not with me", "I'm coming" or even a "yes, but" in order to receive the necessary resources.

To avoid the limits that have been imposed on them, teenage labs may seek help in its network of friends, cousins and colleagues. Looking for the ideal partners, instead of the ideal project, may be strategic for a lab, as when a teenager arranges a night out at the house of a friend who has more permissive parents. Sometimes, a discreet, costless project with a committed partner may lead to a small achievement that boosts the lab.

TEENAGE CHALLENGES

As the teenage years go by, and the lab garners more respect and trust from its parents and sponsors, expectations for results become more rigorous and frequent. In the transition to being a young adult, the lab takes its first steps towards systematizing and monitoring its results, starting a conversation on its evaluation.

A reflection we frequently identified at the convention is the idea that the teenage years should be the eternal age for labs.

"I believe all labs should live in a constant teenage state, which matures over time. If you lose your teenage years, you will absolutely lose your drive to try new things and your ability to fail and to learn from these mistakes in a very short time. If there is no constant adolescence, the very purpose of a lab – that of being a unity that thinks about the future and beyond – is lost."

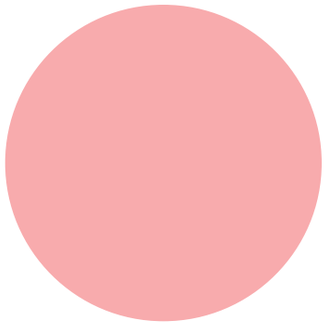
Juan Felipe Yepes (2019), LabCapital

Most participants identified the teenage years as the perfect stage for a lab, both for experiencing the intensity, energy and instability previously mentioned, as well as for their own experimentation on themselves. Even the conflicting relationship with the father and mother is seen as a great source of self-knowledge. However, being a teenager forever would be unfeasible – who would stand being in a constant state of absolute uncertainty, forever living disproportionally dramatic crises motivated by tiny events?

On the other hand, losing the questioning spirit of the teenager would mean ceasing to be a lab. Areas that do not think about themselves nor discuss their systemic and organizational relationships are destined to settle down and reproduce forms of being and acting. They become themselves the system and, in this case, the bureaucratic system. Labs, regardless of their setting and institutional arrangement, must operate as a foreign body within homogenous organizations. How to take advantage of this oddness to motivate other areas and invite them to reflect on their practices and habits of thinking?

The challenge, therefore, is to mature in terms of activity structuring, partner and sponsor relationship, experimentation narratives and public value, without losing the vital and motivational energy. In other words, how can labs grow old without losing their challenging and youthful spirit?

ADULTHOOD AND MATURITY



Even though maturity is desired and dreamed of by many innovation units, we noticed there is a discomfort for labs to see themselves in this stage. We're not quite sure, but it is likely that the innovation labs' agenda is anchored in an idea of youth, and perhaps maturity is linked to aging and the ideas of decline, inability and deterioration of the body, and there is a strong association between growing old and death, disease, distancing, dependence and becoming old-fashioned.

However, maturity is not necessarily a synonym for being old-fashioned. Being a mature adult means reaching a stage of great emotional and intellectual development, associated with a state of fullness, wisdom, prudence, and excellence in reflecting before acting. In this stage, there is more clarity about your own identity. Next, we will discuss these aspects and the possibilities for adulthood and maturity in the life of a public innovation lab.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GROWN-UP LAB?

If, during the teenage years, a lab seeks recognition and autonomy and uses defiance to achieve it, it is in adulthood that the lab achieves stability and awareness of its responsibilities and the scope of its actions. The serenity in its actions and recognition within the public administration are key aspects of this period. A lab in maturity no longer feels as a misfit who struggles to change government on its own; it has opportunities for reconciling with the government, because it starts to see itself as a public institution and understands its role within the management structure. Others also begin to recognize the lab's role and, if the lab's actions are successful and have overcome the barriers to innovation, the lab begins to be seen as relevant and necessary.

In their entry into maturity, young adults still take risks by facing the challenge of learning how to become self-sustainable and obtain legitimacy. As it achieves things, a lab gets relative autonomy in selecting the projects in which they will work on, and can say "no" in negotiations with partners with firmness and empathy, to keep itself in track for its mission.

The lab also does not need to constantly prove its value, as in the beginning of a young, passionate relationship, because, in this moment, what the lab offers and the value it generates by innovation has become clear for its partners. The lab's main strength is its legacy, which allows for autonomy in projects and work methods. This is a stage in which the propulsion energy from its youth

decreases, giving room to heightened stability and to the search for balance between different aspects, such as political and technical management, qualitative and quantitative research, focus on methodologies and resources – as noted by Roman Yosif (2019), Laboratorio de Gobierno, Chile.

One of the positive characteristics of adulthood is the possibility of reflecting on your own trajectory in a long-term perspective.

As a grown-up lab, it has more clarity regarding its own identity – its reasons for existing, and its objectives and proposed value. The lab has already collected results of which it is proud and recognizes its potential and previous failures, which have led to many takeaways.

However, maturity does not prevent crises from happening. As in mid-life crises, there are moments in which a lab questions whether it is still following the path it had originally chosen, whether it should change its lifestyle, its behavior and its priorities. It is a moment to ask deeper questions, and reflecting on its purpose and scope: have the developed projects led to an actual change in the culture of the organization? Did they generate public value? What is turning out to be effective and what should be changed? Should the lab focus on projects in which it already has experience, or should it accept those which create learning opportunities? What does innovation mean? How to keep learning and changing?

If, on one hand, stability allows for more balance, on the other hand, the safety obtained tends to decrease experimentation. As with people, in this stage labs acquire routines and pet-peeves, and a difficulty opening up to new habits develops. By knowing that experimentation is one of the main differentiating characteristics of a lab, how do they maintain their youth and their desire for novelty?

In maturity, a lab tends not to become paralyzed when facing these questions: it seeks to make evaluations and transform itself to continue generating experiments and insights. It makes bolder reflections and uses life experiences as a source of wisdom to read into situations, look for desirable futures and explore possibilities, making decisions with serenity in order to move forward.

EVALUATING THE JOURNEY

There are some requirements for a lab to achieve political and social legitimacy which are not always considered a priority when compared to the urgencies of day-to-day life. Having reached relative stability, the main concern in maturity becomes how to preserve experimentation within the lab.

For this, opening up for new possibilities and new insights is key, as well as constantly reflecting on past enterprises.

Once the lab reaches maturity, the tendencies for sociability (or even the need for constant social contact usually found in early stages) also start to decrease, so it is important to maintain a network of partners, avoiding solitude and isolation.

Much like people who look back at photo albums, diaries, recipe books, special letters, diplomas (or any other evidence of success), preserving the organizational memory and identifying the lessons that have been learned is the first step for labs to conduct their own evaluation. Records, evaluations and continuous learning are always connected and demand a good amount of dedication in order to document processes, projects and work methods, as well as a willingness not only to identify and celebrate success stories, but also to confront weaknesses and failures.

As a developing area, and because of its specificities, the actions of public innovation labs are not always understood. One of the difficulties is to identify adequate evaluation methods and learn how to communicate project results and the public value of their work. It is quite common to face resistance, suspicions and failed expectations, since the volume of results will not always meet the expectations of managers, who think about gains of scale and short-term political return.

The communication of its own value to managers and society is a strategic aspect, and for that it is necessary for a lab to know how to evaluate itself. According to the literature available on the subject, it is easier to establish goals and evaluate products than to evaluate results and impacts, which require methodological rigor in order to be valid and legitimate, not to mention expertise, investment and also the time necessary to conduct such assessments. Frequently, labs that support external teams end up not having much governability when implementing projects and may never know what the obtained results were if they do not have the proper tools to conduct research with these teams.

However, if it is not possible to do a thorough assessment, a simpler, more accessible alternative might be chosen, provided that it meets the lab's need for reviewing its actions and receiving feedback. For example, conducting structured interviews with project participants and managers, as well as interviews with the individuals affected by the projects that were created or modified.

Making some time to organize information, as well as to reflect and carry a more systematic evaluation, result in valuable knowledge and increase the lab's technical capacity, as it makes possible to identify which areas need to be improved, altered or invested in. In short, an assessment is key for labs to consolidate themselves and obtain legitimacy, as it allows for:

- Determining whether the lab delivers the public value it claims to deliver, and what could be changed or strengthened, leading to a clearer purpose;
- Adjustments in management to adapt to the constraints present in the public sector;
- Strengthening or achieving political sponsorship and external legitimacy through communication;
- Building arguments to plan ahead of government transition and political orientation changes;
- Planning and making changes within the lab, since renewing the lab itself (besides being aligned with its mission) leads to credibility within the public servant community;
- Taking decisions based on evidence, not opinions;
- Building a narrative for its own team, which often doubts the reach of their work;
- Disseminate and strengthen legitimacy, convincing managers.

LEGACY AND LONGEVITY

A balanced diet and frequent exercise are some of the – desirable or almost mandatory – measures recommended by specialists for a healthy life. With labs, some of the practices that contribute to a healthy and long-lasting life include organizing files and documents which record the lessons extracted from each project, conducting some sort of evaluation and being willing to continue experimenting within its own operation.

A benefit that stems from these activities is the construction of a legacy which generates useful knowledge for the lab and for the whole innovation ecosystem. As noted in one of the panels by Bruno Monteiro (2019), from LabX: thinking about the legacy the lab wants to leave behind helps it avoid falling into a present-focused mindset, fixed on doing projects, delivering products and generating value in the short-term, which restricts the strategic medium- and long-term perspective, as well as the possibility of reinventing itself.

The spread of contemporary approaches to public innovation is connected to the proposal of increasing the state capacity for building new responses to complex public problems. Such a change would require new knowledge and an alteration in mindset by public servants. Labs seek to influence bureaucracy to adopt new knowledge and technologies in order to test new solutions when they develop projects. And many promote specific dissemination campaigns, such as innovation awards, publications, seminars, toolboxes, and capacitation.

When thinking about legacy, we go back to our discussion on the ultimate purpose of labs, which is to increase the ability of a particular government to develop new responses to complex public problems, which requires a (sometimes systematic) shift of mindset in order to reach a paradigm change while simultaneously avoiding temporary fads. Thus, the issue of transmitting alegacy emerges. Are experimentation labs willing to dedicate themselves to spreading new approaches to innovation, in an effort to reach a wider range of public servants? Considering its small structures, low budget, lack of authority over the public sector, specialization, and lack of standardization of solutions, would labs' mission be to obtain scale and influence the innovation system?

Continuity and sustainability should also be taken in consideration. Organizing and spreading a lab's legacy allows more agents to gain access to knowledge, thus becoming guardians of the innovative, mobilizing methodologies used by labs.

MATURITY CHALLENGES

The dilemmas of maturity are a matter of "relevance or death". Labs that cease to be susceptible to learning its lessons and evolving, or that do not plan their transitions, may die when facing government or agenda changes. Matters of death frequently appear at this stage, and we dedicated a portion of the epilogue of this publication to explore some reflections on this particular subject. In any case, a question that came up during the teenage years still remains: how to reach maturity without losing the creative, questioning spirit, the will to take risks and the determination to try new things? How to maintain the capacity to transform oneself when faced with the many challenges of our context?

The challenge of maintaining a youthful spirit during maturity may be observed both in the projects a lab chooses to work on and in internal processes and work methods, so as to avoid seeing innovation and its routines too rigorously or orthodoxically.

"I do not want to be part of innovation if it means a new orthodoxy, such as the transformation through which management and strategic planning or results management have gone through. I want to live in a mature immaturity."

Bruno Monteiro (2019), LabX

These questions are linked to the reflection on "experimental humility":

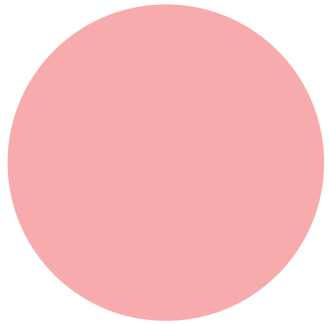
“That’s what will allow us to renew ourselves, to define and redefine ourselves. That’s an attitude we fight to preserve, so that others might also make mistakes and experiment. This is where I think maturity is – in looking back, absorbing the key takeaways and moving forward.”

Aura Cifuentes (2019), Equipo de Innovación Pública

There are those who claim that, as a lab becomes more mature, a development in the direction of systemic and durable impact becomes more relevant, as well as working in a more integrated way with the administration, so as to ensure its relevance. It’s a different situation from the childhood and teenage stages, in which the lab exists to provide a safe space for new approaches and experimental ideas.

Albeit essential for consolidation and improvement, the relationship with the legacy and memory of the lab can also be challenging. It is seductive to live only on the memories and glories of the past, narrated heroically to legitimize one’s own existence, regardless of a possible stagnation in the present time. How not to be frightened when facing the future, but purify the myths previously lived, improving current actions and continuing to build relevance?

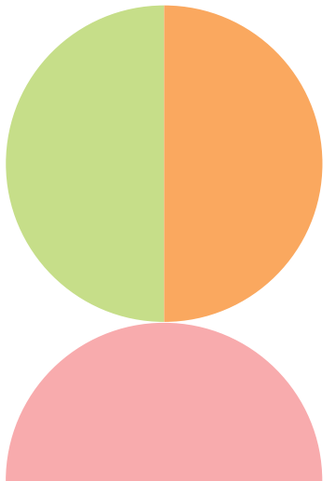
The power of the grown-up stage is revealed when one notices that it contains the various stages of the life cycle. A child remains alive in experimentation and learning, and the teenage years and youth add boldness to it. Thus, previous stages import a renewing energy to a lab in its maturity.



LIFE CHALLENGES

In this chapter we extend for a few more pages the invitation to dive into our metaphor. We started from the life cycle to structure the research that generated a number of reflections on the challenges related to the different stages of a lab's life, as described in the essays on birth, childhood, the teenage years and adulthood. In this final chapter, we go back to the material generated seeking to find overall challenges, those that permeate more than one stage of life. By doing this, we also widen our perspective on the use of the metaphor.

We are aware that the questions debated in this section do not exhaust the discussion, but our aim here is to foster strategic dialogues in existing or future teams of public innovation labs. The questions identified and described next are related to *essence, family, learnings*, and *transitions*.



SEARCH FOR ITS ESSENCE

The first decisions that influence the definition of what a lab does are taken even before its birth. The future unit receives a name, which oftentimes is accompanied by a brand, a concept, a physical space, and a founding team.

In its birth, the lab becomes visible to the world, even though it has more intentions than achievements. As a child, a lab takes its first steps, which provide indications about its nature and what it does. As a teenager, crises and questions arise. In its adulthood, matters related to the scope of its work and its priorities emerge.

In different moments of the life cycle, the search for the lab's reason for being, which we call its essence, is a permanent challenge. The lack of clarity on its essence may be accompanied by insecurities for the team, frictions in the relation with its sponsors and low legitimacy. Identity crises may become frequent in this scenario. Although it is important to have a name, a brand and adequate physical spaces, one might fall to the temptation of attributing an excessive importance to these questions in detriment of more fundamental questions.

Questions such as "Are you a lab within government or are you a lab outside of the government's walls?", regarding the institutional position occupied by the lab, need to be answered as soon as possible by the founding team. Otherwise, they may prove to be destabilizing in untimely situations.

Questions like the one mentioned above follow the team throughout its journey, and it is not possible to answer them in a definitive way, as contexts and political priorities change. The lab's choices in day-to-day life will be indicative of what the lab really is. Its interactions with public servants, politicians and citizens will create perceptions on the team, their work processes and, most importantly, on the value generated by the lab.

As with people, the path in the search for their reason of being helps making crucial life decisions on what to do, how to do it, who to be with and why act in certain ways.

A way of dealing with the search for the essence is to create moments in the lab's schedule to discuss this topic as a group. Through the lens of the metaphor, these could be seen as therapy sessions. These structuring and reflexive discussions allow for a lab to evaluate its journey, its achievements and its mistakes; they also guide the lab towards building or updating its mission, guidelines and values.

If well conducted, these moments may prove crucial to evaluate and update the lab's responses to changes in the political and institutional context, as well as incorporating the takeaways accumulated from its experience. Stories collected during our research indicate that one of the characteristics of maturity is the sharing of a collective understanding of the lab's essence. With this, the team becomes capable of better defining its limits, adjusting the focus of its mission and identifying situations when it should say "no".

To develop this understanding, it might make sense to start by asking: *What the lab is not? What does it not do?* This may contribute to the creation of common perspectives. The application of the metaphor shows us that childhood is the stage in which the lab's exploration processes begin, but they last

well into adulthood. During the teenage years, there seems to be a drive for some definitions:

"It is a time where the lab has to find its role and place either as an institution or as an ongoing source for an institution to produce innovation around people that generates or contributes to public values."

Sabine Junginger (2019), GovLab and former MindLab

We observed, based on the data collected, that a mature lab has more clarity on its role within the government and its relevance to society. Even though it may be seductive to import narratives used by consolidated initiatives to justify its role, it is through the team's experience that the narratives on what makes the lab unique in its context become clearer.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

A government innovation lab is born and grows up in a specific time and place, as part of a predetermined institution and surrounded by many older organizations. At the same time, the lab's team brings along the organizational culture of their previous experiences, which influence their competencies and operational capacities. The organizations with which the lab can cooperate to conduct cross-sectional activities are also part of a context in which the lab is inserted.

Families tend to shape their children to their image. However, as explored throughout the life cycle, labs play a transformative role, which implies transformation of their own context. This tense relation between change and persistence permeates all stages of life and occurs mainly in association to the agents which we are referring to as the family: the institution in which the lab is located or to which it is associated, the political leaders who operate as immediate sponsors, the teams directly involved and also other teams of public servants who tend to partner up with the lab or who occupy a position institutionally close to it.

The maintenance of good relationships and the support of political leaders are fundamental for a lab to promote the changes it suggests, such as designing services that better adapt to the lives of those using them, promoting collaborations or improving bureaucratic processes. The challenge is to exert the role of agent of change, without destabilizing the family environment. In other words, the challenge is to deal with the family pressure and impulses of organizational defiance, addressing the resistances and conflicts generated.

It is worth noting that the relation with the family and this tension between conformity and defiance suffer transformations throughout the life cycle, as the lab matures and better understands (or even reconsiders) its identity.

The relation with the family environment poses some of the most relevant challenges in the life of the lab. It is mainly to these agents that the lab will need to show its relevance; at the same time, family members will become the preferential public for the achievement of the lab's mission. It is frequent that expectations, or even anxiety, regarding the achievements of the lab emerge from political sponsors, public servants or even the team responsible for the lab, like parents who want to witness their child shine as soon as possible.

These mothers, fathers, uncles and cousins end up adapting the limits of the lab's operations. Interactions with these individuals, groups or organizations are subjected to varied degrees of resistance to action proposals. They will embrace the team in the various difficult moments in the lab's life – facing the difficulties and mistakes as part of a natural maturing process or as a flaw in the experimentation project. The family, and specifically the political sponsors, will have to deal with the tension between experimenting and implementing on a larger scale – one of the main cross-sectional dilemmas in the life of a lab. The family may or may not be capable of understanding the lab's mission, adding to it or refusing it, with varied degrees of intensity. They will also react in different ways to the expectations linked to the birth of the lab and the "stigmas" created on its first results.

However, the family does not act only as a

restrictor. It can also propel the lab's operations. Labs closer to the core of the government may take advantage of their locus to widen their rallying capacity and operate in a comprehensive way, while labs with a relationship with civil society organizations may take advantage of this capital to work in a closer, more synergetic way to the expectations of citizens.

"Our lab relies directly on the chief of government. We therefore have a global view of the work in different areas, as well as a capacity to conduct cross-sectional projects, which are typically more difficult to be executed in public organizations."

Diego Galante (2019), Mentes Creativas

A potential – possibly essential – pathway to deal with the expectations of family is the construction of a clear narrative for the purposes of the lab. It is necessary to be capable of explaining and promoting the principles, values, methodologies, and products delivered by the lab, and even to include the family in their development. The use of little-known methodologies and vocabularies, in addition to unusual deliveries, may amplify the resistance from the institutional environment. Projects which the unspecified objective is getting family-members involved in the development process of the lab may be an effective way of creating a sense of belonging and mitigating anxiety. Once the leadership and other public servants see themselves as part of the change, there may be a renewal of the lab's endorsement.

Family is permanent in the life of individuals, as well as in the life of labs. However disruptive the value-creation proposition of a lab may be – with traits that stray from its family –, there is a common DNA, so that, once the youth matures, it comprehends its parents and even recognizes itself in them. Labs also have similarities to its mother-organization.

The understanding of similarities and differences may be fundamental to ensure a positive coexistence and a healthy long-term relationship. Being aware of these contradictions and differentiations allows for the lab not to be engulfed by the institutional tradition and to successfully exert its mission. After all, labs are guided by their questioning regarding dominant systems, both in organizational and in methodological questions.

LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Another cross-sectional challenge refers to the art of maturing without losing the ability to experiment and learn. Considering that is quite common to compare a child to a sponge, when it comes to acquiring new knowledge, can we extend this comparison to newborn labs? We dedicate the following lines to explore the evolution of the role of learning.

As seen in the chapter focused on birth and childhood, stories of teams that undergo intense experimentation processes in order to understand the nature of the lab itself in its beginnings are rather frequent. This is an almost inevitable posture for the development of the organization. At this stage, different aspects of the lab are put in practice, and the founding teams engage in work methods more open to collective learning. On many occasions this engagement stems from interactions with teams from other labs, surveys and reports, as well as the participation in events.

With the first achievements, the team begins to accumulate takeaways based on their own experience, and the ideal model previously designed starts to be tested in real life. It is through practice – successful or not – that the team learns what is applicable in its context. And the incorporation of these insights and learning new lessons will put the lab in a state of continuous development.

As told by one of the teams, two types of projects helped understand the relation between deliveries and takeaways. In the first type of project (*pioneering*), there is more risk involved due to the fact that the lab has never conducted a similar project. In the second type (*safe*), projects tend to be less risky, as they rely on previously executed methodologies, team up with partners who have already worked with the lab or deal with an ongoing problem in which the team already has some expertise.

At the beginning of the life cycle, it is common for a lab to have more pioneering projects, due to its little accumulated knowledge. The challenge of the team would therefore be to discern which projects can evolve to the safe category, repeating at least one of these elements (partner, problem or methodology). As projects are finalized, the challenge becomes to avoid having a portfolio limited to safe projects.

A possibility regarding the dynamic of specialization is that the incentives to generate results may lead labs to become specialists in one type of service throughout their lives, for instance the training of public servants. This may become, in some moment, a line of work that ensures the expansion of the support base within public administration. If the room for the execution of pioneering projects is not maintained, with an experimental characteristic, the institution may face difficulties when adapting to eventual transitions, which require learning new approaches, developing different lines of work and abandoning previous initiatives. A good example was pointed out by Roman Yosif (2019) on the political transition affecting the Chilean lab between 2017 and 2018: "and then came a moment of high tensions, when new authorities arrived and did a sort of test, saying "you have two weeks to deliver a new model for the government lab".

A second hypothesis is that a portion of the labs – mainly those in their initial stages – have volatile portfolios, with little to no safe projects. Each project the lab works on has a high learning curve, which may lead to

distress, competition and waste of energy by the team. From the standpoint of generating insights, this may be interesting in specific moments of the life cycle, perhaps when there is a need for testing new directions. However, an excessive focus on this type of project may also compromise the sustainability of the lab in sensitive moments, as pioneering projects require a significant amount of energy and resources from the team and, if there is not sufficient attention paid to the execution of the project, it may be hard to convert them into perceptible results. As written by Sabine Junginger (2019): "the MindLab journey was paralleled and accompanied by ongoing self-reflection and research into new areas. With this in mind, one might argue that such activities are incredibly important to maintain leadership of thought and to inform the conversations as well as to drive them".

With time, there may be an increase in the expectations for results by managers and sponsors and, with this, a trend to do what has already proven to be successful, reducing the room for experimentation of new formats and projects and compromising new insights.

Another crucial topic to the challenge of life-long learning regards evaluation processes of the lab's projects, as discussed in the adulthood chapter. Although it showed up as a maturity question, the creation of monitoring and evaluation systems should be present from the very beginning of the life cycle. The changes concern the instruments used for evaluation, seeking to establish a balance of use of time and energy from the team between these activities and the lab's objectives.

To implement an evaluation culture, it is not necessary to hire external professionals who conduct thorough, complex impact evaluations on the lab's operations. One may start with the creation of evaluation spaces that have a basic reflection structure between one project and the other, preferably with feedback from the participants of the project. It is also advisable to create opening and closing practices for projects, which take into consideration minimal parameters of what is expected to be learned or evaluated, identify which were the initial hypothesis and objectives and which modifications took place during this journey.

Experimentation and evaluation walk hand in hand, helping to minimize risks and also the cost of failing, as the result of a project may be evaluated and improved before its actual implementation. It is in this intersection that resides a key value delivered by labs: they should be capable of generating accessible knowledge and useful solutions for the government they work for.

"How can we know if the lab is in a consolidated position, without ceasing to learn? This is super relevant, as labs die when they cease to be able to change and learn."

Juan Felipe Lopez (2019), former Laboratorio de Gobierno

TRANSITIONS

One of the most direct contributions of the life cycle metaphor is the idea that there are indeed stages that a lab goes through. However, we have realized through actual observation that these stages do not necessarily correspond to a chronological trajectory, and some reoccur during a life cycle.

Although not crucial, these stages allow us to reflect on common questions for labs, lived in particular ways by each organization. Transitional moments were identified as soon as the division in stages was made, and we will dedicate these final reflections to these moments, addressing two perspectives: transitions between life stages and political cycles.

Transitions between life stages constitute moments of tension between what is kept and what is transformed. What does a teenager keep from its childhood, and what does it leave behind? What does the adult preserve from its teenage years? In these transitions, new challenges appear, and old formulas may not be applicable. A type of project that seemed well established among the lab's activities may become contested, or the team may start to question the reason for the lab to exist in its specific format. In a lab's life, transitions between stages may be difficult to face; without them, however, there are no new discoveries or maturity gains.

By looking at political transitions, the expectations on innovation labs become clear when they face the challenge of having their methods, objectives, deliveries and existence validated. What we discussed up to this point – essence, family and life-long learning – also goes through the need to maintain and renew political support. In this context, transitional moments are especially sensitive, as unsuccessful transitions may result in their death. There is, therefore, the challenge of preserving the lab's essence while also surviving the transition.

In these moments of political change, several challenges in a lab's life come back and are put to the test. The lab's capacity to cultivate positive relations with the family will prove key – mainly with agents and organizations that are less susceptible to be affected by change. In the same way, the search for its essence must also be present. After all, when a new leadership arrives and there is a need to explain the lab's attributions, will there be clarity or doubt? When it becomes necessary to communicate a situation in which the lab has made a difference, will there be a well-documented example? Will it be possible to explain to the new sponsors the need for experimenting? The capacity to mobilize partners, create a narrative around the lab and its activities continues to be fundamental, and tension between deliveries and experimentation reaches a crucial point.

Many labs make efforts to formalize their existence into an institutional organization chart before a transition, in a move that may lead both to security towards the change or to a stiffening of its attributions. Others invest in the documentation and publication of methods, successful case studies and in the negotiation of partnerships with organizations outside the government structure. These strategies frequently lead to the execution of events – seminars, publications, conventions –, in which the political leaders may participate in the positive agenda of labs and public innovation.

The preparation for political transition, which has predictable cycles in democracies – albeit full of uncertainty – is a moment in which labs are tested as organizations

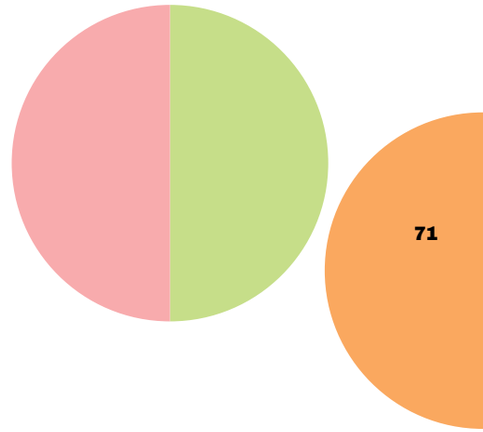
susceptible to transformation. For this reason, transitions (if successfully conducted) have the potential of generating positive effects in the longevity of a lab. After these moments, new challenges and life stages come up, enabling the development of the lab – even if this means that key relations, parts of the portfolio and narratives need to be left behind, which is sometimes necessary to reach maturity.

"And I believe, I insist, that [the transitional process] was very good. It was good for the team because it tested us. And it tested us so that we could say 'we are really capable of innovating'. As a team, aside from asking institutions to be innovative, we are also capable of being innovators ourselves. We are capable of reinventing ourselves, we are capable of making our model evolve, we are capable of questioning our methodologies."

Roman Yosif (2019), Laboratorio de Gobierno

For innovation labs, transitions are key moments in organizational development. They are part of the maturing process and many times prompt the ideal moment for a "change of stage", when a lab is no longer simply "finding a way to survive". It's not always that political transitions coincide with a transition in the life cycle; however, it is common for the former to boost the latter, requiring labs to mature earlier to face turmoil in a more strategic and safe manner.

As the appearance of white hair or a pregnancy provide opportunities to look upon the past and prepare for the future, the experience of transitions by labs – either internal or external – may be faced as a moment of self-reflection and strategic decision making, paying attention to previously unimaginable opportunities and opening up to what novelty might bring.



A vida é um milagre.
Cada flor,
com sua forma, sua cor, seu aroma,
cada flor é um milagre.
Cada pássaro,
com sua plumagem, seu voo, seu canto,
cada pássaro é um milagre.
O espaço, infinito,
o espaço é um milagre.
O tempo, infinito,
o tempo é um milagre.
A memória é um milagre.
A consciência é um milagre.
Tudo é milagre.
Tudo, menos a morte.
— Bendita a morte, que é o fim de todos os milagres.

Manuel Bandeira
"Preparação para a morte" (*Preparation for death*),
Estrela da Tarde

Life is a miracle.
Each flower,
with its shape, color, smell
each flower is a miracle.
Each bird,
with its feathers, its flight, its song
each bird is a miracle.
Space, infinite space,
Space is a miracle.
Time, infinite time,
time is a miracle.
Memory is a miracle.
Conscience is a miracle.
Everything is a miracle.
Everything but death.
– Blessed be death, the end of all miracles!

Epilogue

AFTER LIFE, DEATH

This publication sought to explore the life cycle of public innovation labs, identifying the main characteristics, questions and challenges of each stage, and comprehending the transitional moments between them. However, when discussing life stages, it is inevitable for the topic of death to come up, implicit in the discussion as it represents the end of life.

What we present next, in a brief and open way, are reflections that derived from the topic during the discussions of the *Encontro Internacional de Inovação em Governo* in São Paulo and that helped us amplify our understanding regarding the life of a lab. We face these questions also as a form of shedding light on new perspectives about the idea of death as an invitation to the continuity of conversations on life cycles. We begin with the reasons for which death is such a recurring and instigating topic, then we indicate different circumstances in which death takes place, continuing to think about the end of life and its potential repercussions.

Discussing death and accepting it as part of the life cycle is a hard task. Death is a taboo. It holds a negative connotation and is surrounded by enigmas. For human beings, death is mysterious by nature, for the obvious reason that nobody can experience it and remain in the world of the living. Nevertheless, despite being hidden behind euphemisms, secrets and mysticism, it is our sole certainty.

If the dead are forever gone, death says much more about those that remain in this world: we look for representations, create rituals and define scientific criteria to identify it, in an attempt to explain what happens and unravel the unknown, hoping that, when our time comes, we will also be mourned and remembered. The fear of the end of life and the uncertainty on what succeeds it leads to an eagerness – at least in western culture – to identify the causes of death, so that it becomes possible to avoid it and continue to hide it from our day-to-day life. Its forewarnings, like the deterioration of the body, disease and dependence, are seen as a failure and not always welcomed as a natural part of the life cycle.

When it comes to public institutions, the debate about the end has other nuances. The State and its bureaucracies are created seeking perennity, safety and stability. Its end, therefore, may be seen as strange, unpredictable and undesirable. Innovation labs are immersed in these values, for being part of public institutions.

Possibly for this reason, when witnessing the death of reference units across the world (in Mexico, Finland or Denmark, for example) these occurrences are seen with shock and grief – characterizing feelings of sorrow, deep sadness and even anger. While the labs that are gone take with them a part of the history and part of the potential of public innovation labs, the labs that stay alive, young and old, are reminded of their own finitude.

Circumstances of death

When facing the death of a lab, it is common to seek to understand its causes, possibly as a form of self-protection and an attempt of maintaining its own life. Given labs' different natures and settings, explored thus far, it is natural to assume that the death of each one of them entails singularities and is located in a very particular context. Instead of looking for direct causes, we gathered reflections on potential circumstances of death.

We might be dealing, for example, with an announced death, which is already expected when it occurs. For labs, an announced – or even programmed – death may be directly linked to the form of political support outlined in its creation, as described in the childhood chapter, or even planned as a strategy to optimize the political support and effectiveness of its actions at the end of an administration.

When unexpected, death occurs out of nowhere and, aside from being surprising, results in commotion. Because of its

unpredictability and diversity of causes, it is much harder to understand its circumstances. As in an accident, it is not always possible to comprehend the whole situation and the nuances of the fact. Even when there are survivors and witnesses, there can be many versions and a good deal of speculative hypotheses (some whimsical!), and theories are made to avoid death in similar circumstances. This type of death can occur in a specific context, with political or organizational events, on different levels. The very lack of preparation and inexperience of the lab in dealing with transitions may be fatal.

An inspirational perspective suggests that the natural death of a lab should be seen as a goal to be pursued, because it would mean that its mission of disseminating innovation within institutions was accomplished and there would no longer be a need for its existence. Therefore, it could also be seen as heroic. In this case, would not death in fact be an opportunity for rebirth? Even if institutions start to work in total engagement with a culture of innovation as we currently know it – albeit this is not a plausible alternative in many places – the lab could reappear in its role to challenge the status quo. After all, innovation is a dynamic and contextual concept, which only exists as a response to an established system.

End of life

An excessive focus on explaining the end may overshadow other important aspects in the life of a lab, including the transition process towards death. The end is inevitable – the end of life, of a body, of a term. More than inevitable, it is part of life and, even though death is frightening and arbitrary, up to the last breath or the last delivered project and the last discharge of employees, the lab remains alive.

Death is not the only end a lab experiences. Throughout the life cycle, we observed several moments in which it was necessary to deal with imposed limitations: the end of childhood and the increase in expectations; the end of teenage years and the gaining of awareness regarding responsibilities and duties; the end of the first partnerships; the end of successful (or not) projects and the end of a particular administration are some examples. Each ending leads to accumulated insights on how to navigate transitions.

By recognizing mortality as a possibility, we open up space for the end of existence to be less of a battle against a disease and more of a process of recognition of a new moment of transition – as long as it is conducted with respect for the life that preceded it. Being able to publicize the ending of the lab, finishing each project and systematizing experiences may lighten the load of life.

The effort the team invested throughout a lab's life may be directed less to its mere survival and more to the strategic generation of value through projects and the maintenance of the questioning spirit. Compared to a human life, many survival and social interaction strategies should be constantly conducted, but they are not the ones that bring meaning to life. The life of a lab that loses its purpose is like that of a patient breathing through machines. This does not seem to be the fate the vast majority of innovation units wants for themselves. That might be death in life. Further, a quest for immortality may draw one closer to self-centered efforts of maintenance of the status quo than to a search for the meaning of life.

Post mortem

By thinking about death, we also create room for reflection on what follows. We do not have aspirations of entering the mysteries of the afterlife; instead, we seek to investigate the ritual of elaboration and attribution of meaning to diverse transitional moments, prompting measures to reorganize the life of those that remained.

An objective way of thinking about these measures would be to focus on the legacy – a discussion initiated in the chapter dedicated to adulthood –, which is the knowledge, values and missions left behind to others when death comes. The legacy of an institution may be seen as a form of inheritance, destined to specific beneficiaries, or as a collective asset, favouring the whole community in a diffused way. It may also be directed towards other public innovation labs, towards the sponsor institution or even towards the public administration as a whole.

The idea of a legacy refers to matters of continuity and sustainability. Leaving a legacy corresponds to ensuring or, at least, creating favorable conditions which allow for the continuation of the project initiated. Or even, to create room for the development of new things.

An example of this are the records of the lab's work methods, such as its approaches towards innovation and the methods used in projects, contributing to instrumentalize other government innovation units and therefore influence new behaviors and work rituals. A lab's way of thinking also has an immeasurable value, be it their work principles, insights obtained from projects or even reflections on its institutional and systemic role. However, this knowledge is not always rigorously registered, and is also not transferable. What can be done is contributing in a significant way to the increase of the repertoire of forms of reaching confidence and a good reputation in diverse contexts.

Beyond its records, a legacy that certainly remains alive are its potential children, here understood as the units that received mentorship from the lab and the people that composed the team at the now-defunct lab. These professionals, while they were establishing a lab, were themselves being formed and transformed by the experience, and may continue promoting such inquiries and continue to adapt the lab's forms of doing and thinking to new contexts, new problems and new teams.

We can also see the legacy as an opening for possibilities. The opportunity to motivate public servants emerges from the creation of concrete examples of alternative behaviors and potentially new practices within the stiff structures of bureaucracy. Or, the precedent set indicates the possibility of adopting an experimental posture towards work (rather than providing a good example of specific behaviors), challenging the status quo from the observation, practice and reflection point of view. It widens, therefore, the possible lines of action of the State and constantly rehearses desirable futures.

Lastly, we would like for this publication, with a declared focus on the living stages of a lab, to be an inspiration for new works and reflections regarding its death. This is a gap we see as an opportunity of continuity for this research, addressing cases, examples and the posthumous implications of innovation initiatives. This epilogue is, thus, an invitation to reflect on the mysteries and paradoxes of the end of the life of public innovation labs.

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OUR TEAM

CAIO WERNECK

has 10 years experience working on strategy, program design and evaluation, open innovation and experimentation. He holds a MPP from the Hertie School, a degree in Design Thinking from the Hasso Plattner Institut, and a BA in Public Administration from the School of Government at Fundação João Pinheiro. In 2018, Caio joined (011).lab as Director of Methods, helping to structure the lab. He was coordinator of the *Encontro Internacional de Inovação em Governo* in 2019. He currently works as a consultant in public innovation and collective learning, focused on Latin America.

ELISABETE FERRAREZI

is a public policy and government administration expert at the federal government, with a PhD on Sociology by the University of Brasília and a master's on public administration from Getúlio Vargas Foundation. At GNova, she developed experimentation projects, and co-authored the Innovation in Practice book series. At Enap, she acted as general coordinator for research and professional training. She was an advisor at the Information Evaluation and Management Secretariat and the Social and Productive Inclusion Secretariat at the Ministry Of Social Development.

ISABELLA BRANDALISE

is a PhD student in the School of Design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and a consultant in public innovation projects. She holds a MFA in Transdisciplinary Design from Parsons School of Design – The New School and a MA in Contemporary Art from the University of Brasília. Between 2016 and 2018, she worked as a consultant for the Danish innovation lab MindLab, in collaboration with GNova, contributing to structuring the lab's operations and building capacity in the team in design-led methods and research.

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is a MFA candidate in Transdisciplinary Design at Parsons School of Design – The New School and holds a bachelor's degree in International Relations from the University of São Paulo. Since 2017, he is part of the team of (011).lab – Laboratório de Inovação em Governo da Prefeitura de São Paulo. He is currently the Director of Methods and Innovation Skills and leads projects which use design methodologies to experiment solutions and develop capacities to innovate with municipal-level public servants.

MANUEL BONDUKI

lectures at Insper on the topics of public sector innovation and behavioral sciences. He is a PhD candidate at Fundação Getúlio Vargas, where he has also received his masters. Manuel has worked in the Brazilian federal government for the past 10 years as a Senior Policy Specialist, where he was also a member of GNova innovation lab at Enap. His research is about digital government, government as a platform, barriers to innovation, federalism and social policies. He is a regular writer on government innovation at legal news website Jota.

ABOUT THE LABS

(011).LAB

(011).lab is the government innovation lab in the Municipal Innovation and Technology Secretariat for São Paulo. It was born in 2017 as a strategy to bring the public administration closer to the citizens, increase the efficiency of the municipal government and the quality of public services.

The lab's actions seek to integrate and develop – along with public servants, citizens and agents at the innovation ecosystem – solutions for complex public problems. To do so, (011).lab operates within three lines of work: to design and improve public services, to mobilize communities to practice public innovation and to develop capacities to innovate with public servants.

011lab.prefeitura.sp.gov.br

GNOVA

GNova – Laboratório de Inovação em Governo was created in 2016 following an initiative of the then Ministry of Planning, Development and Management, along with Enap. The lab's mission is to develop innovative solutions for projects with institutions at the Brazilian federal government in order for the public service to better respond to requests from society.

To address problems and innovation, GNova uses multidisciplinary methodologies inspired in design, social sciences and behavioral economics. It works in prospection, experimentation and dissemination of innovation in services and public policies, with the objective of promoting the culture and practice of innovation within the public administration.

gnova.enap.gov.br

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Nada acontece duas vezes
nem acontecerá. Eis nossa sina.
Nascemos sem prática
e morremos sem rotina.

Wisława Szymborska
"Nada duas vezes" (*Nothing twice*),
Um amor feliz

Nothing can ever happen twice
In consequence, the sorry fact is
That we arrive here improvised
and leave without the chance to practice.

The typographic family used
is Chivo, by Héctor Gatti for
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Labs emerge as an effort to deal with the uncertainties and complexities of public problems. These are units dedicated to experimentation, capable of quickly understanding problems and coming up with solutions based on trial and error. Their objective is to contribute to the creation of policies and services that are sensitive to the needs of the people. In this publication, we look into the childhood, the teenage years, adulthood and maturity of government innovation labs. We based our research on the practice and reflections of managers and public innovation teams. We hope this is an opportunity to direct our energy towards the development of organizations with a heightened consciousness of their own life cycles.

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