



WATERLOO INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL  
INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE

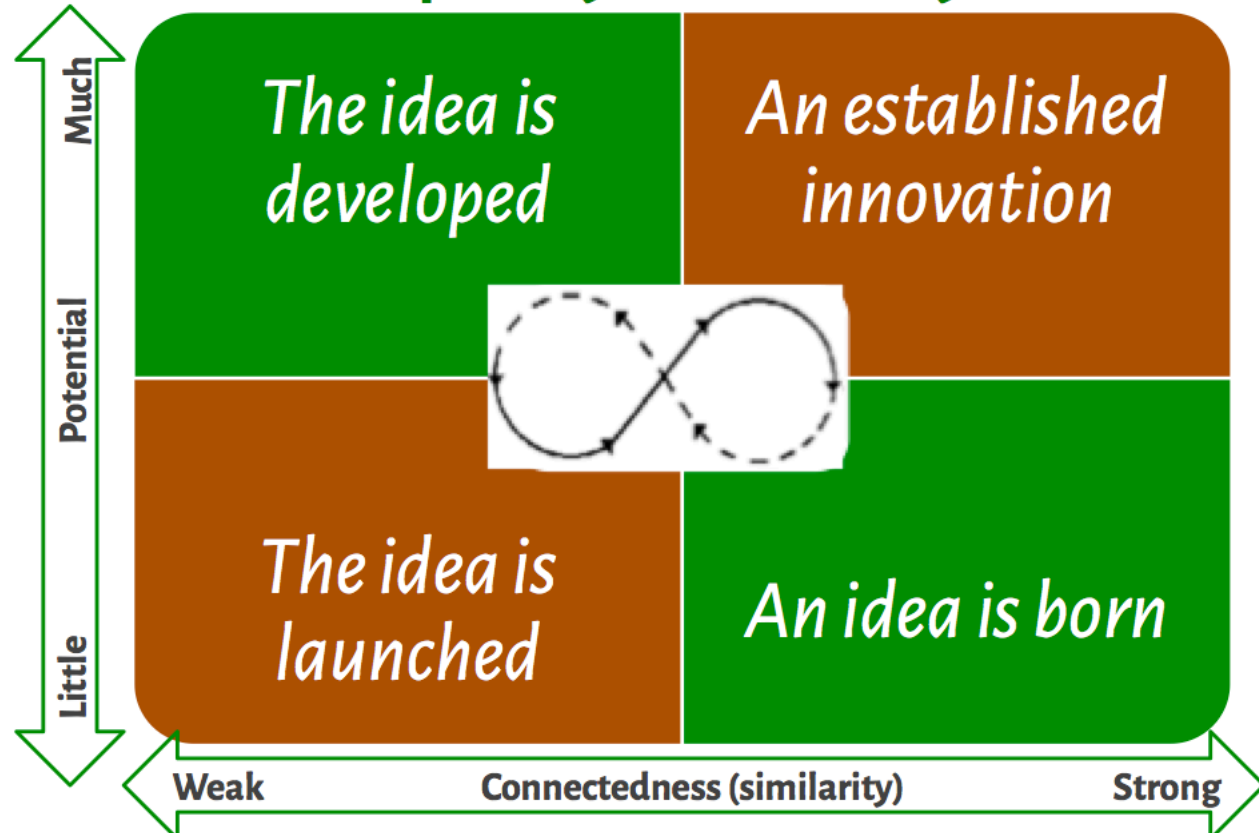


## The adaptive cycle in social systems

**Frances has** explained what she calls the life cycle of an innovation. This is the adaptive cycle translated to think about a social innovation idea or initiative. You'll recognize the visual of this, to the right.

**The model** is really useful to identify what stage of development an innovation is in.

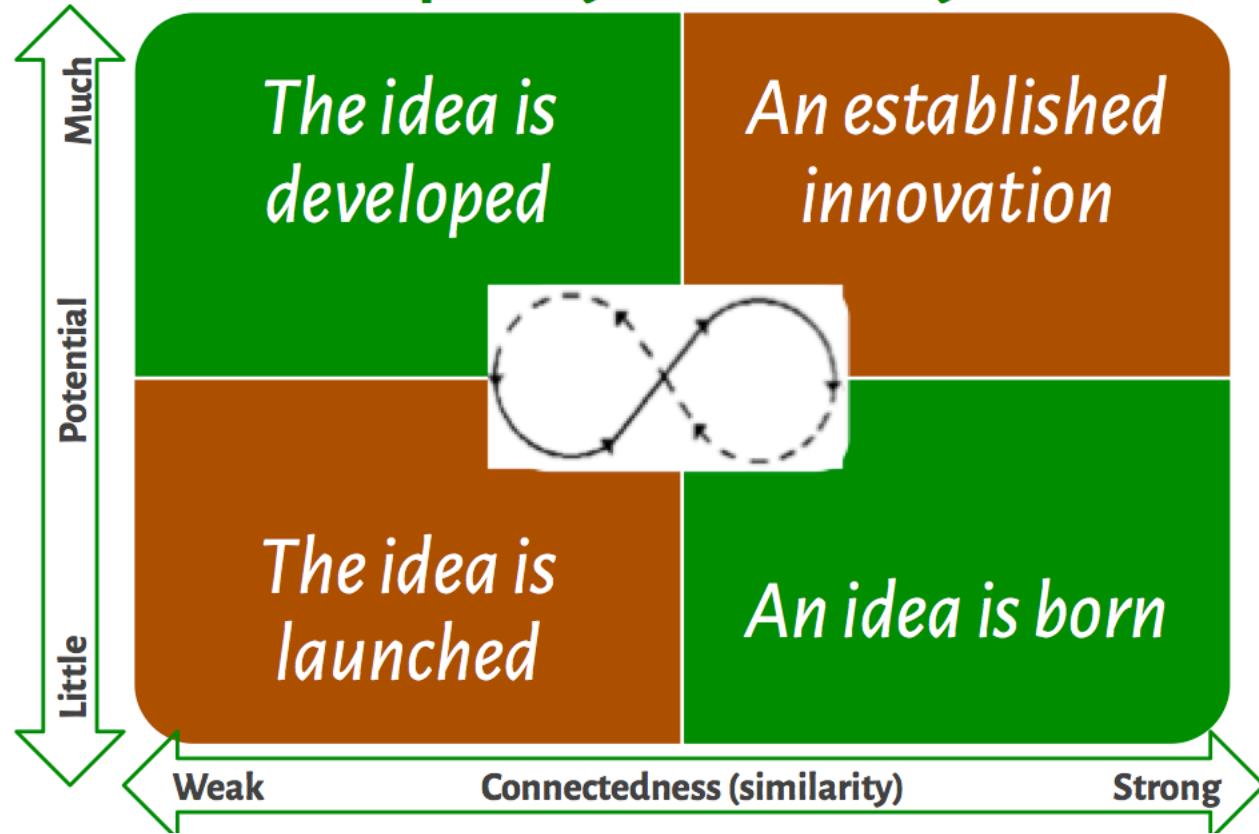
**Knowing where** the innovation is at helps to explain what's going on, what the main activities are, what opportunities and challenges are present, what the people involved are experiencing, and also what's ahead and how to best prepare for that.



# The adaptive cycle in social systems

**In this exercise**, we want you to practice using the adaptive cycle to identify the stage of development of the initiatives you're involved in or interested in.

**Start with** your own idea, initiative, or organization. Where would you place it on the adaptive cycle? Which phase is it currently in? Then think about—what insights does this give you into current realities and needs?



# The adaptive cycle in social systems

**In an earlier** exercise, you were asked to categorize some of the most promising examples you've found of innovative approaches in your particular problem domain.

**Now, take** a few of those and think about where they seem to be on the adaptive cycle. What does their stage of development mean for their potential for experimenting and learning? For partnering? For scaling to achieve more impact?

