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# Innovation SL

## Creating the Future Today

### Start Ups: Problem Solution Fit. Your First Milestone

By Francis Stevens George, CEO Innovation SL

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2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 12.03.2025

**Innovation SL**  
**An Entrepreneurship Support Organization (ESO)**

Enabling Sierra Leone's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem to source  
& develop impact start-ups & scale-ups

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# PROBLEM SOLUTION FIT

**Problem-Solution Fit** is the foundation of any successful startup. It means you've identified a real problem that people care about, and you've created a solution that effectively solves it. Without this fit, startups risk building products or services that no one needs or wants. Startups often fail because they focus too much on the product and not enough on whether it solves a meaningful problem for their target customers.

When a startup achieves problem-solution fit, it validates that there's a genuine demand for their offering, making it easier to attract customers, partners, and investors.

If you don't have problem-solution fit, you're just guessing—and that's risky in entrepreneurship. Once you get this fit right, you have a strong foundation to move towards product-market fit and sustainable growth.

This presentations takes you through the process of achieving a Problem Solution Fit.

## ARE YOU A START UP

Bringing a new product into an existing market

Bringing a new product into a new market

Bringing a new product into an existing market and trying to resegment that market as a low-cost entrant

Bringing a new product into an existing market and trying to resegment that market as a niche entrant

YOUR FIRST  
MILESTONE

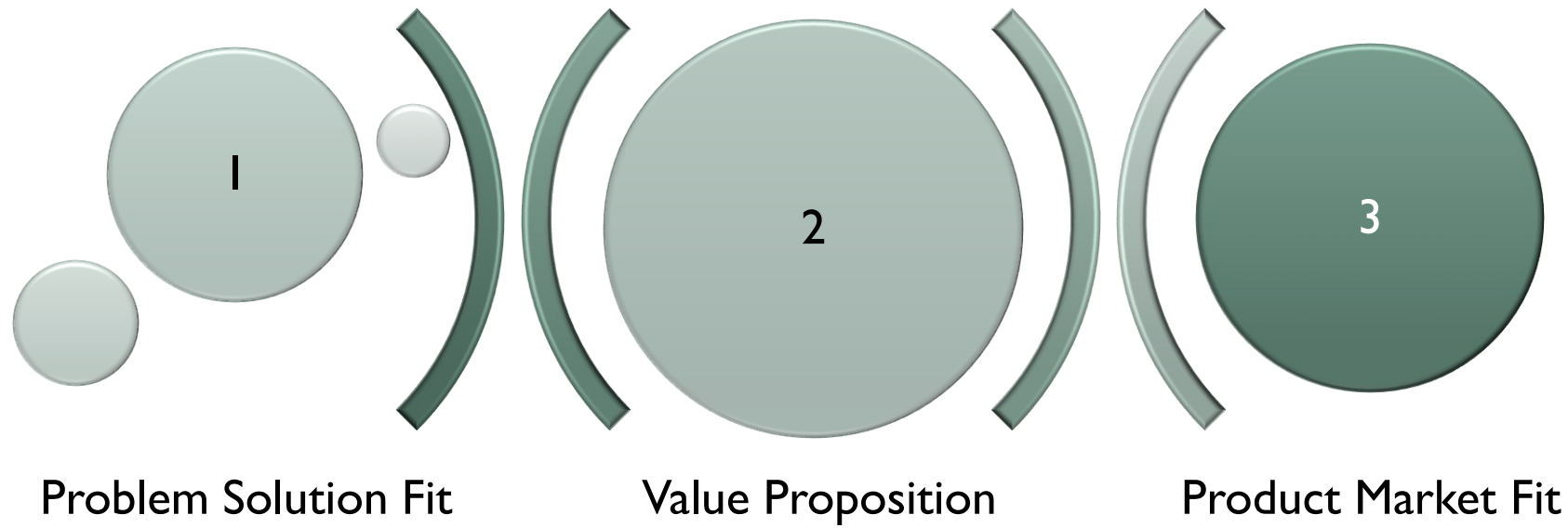
# Problem Solution Fit



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- "If wetin you bring dey work fine na field under tree, no light, no internet, e mean say you don really find di right solution for African farmers."

- *"Technology in agriculture only works when it solves the actual problems farmers face, not the ones we imagine from a distance."*  
— **Kofi Annan**, Former UN Secretary-General & Advocate for Agricultural Innovation in Africa
- *"The biggest challenge in AgriTech is not developing technology, but ensuring it fits the farmer's real needs and conditions."*  
— **Strive Masiyiwa**, Founder of Econet & AgriTech Investor
- *"Farmers don't adopt technologies because they're high-tech. They adopt them because they solve a pain point."*  
— **Calestous Juma**, Author of *The New Harvest: Agricultural Innovation in Africa*
- *"The best agricultural solutions are co-created with farmers, not imposed on them."*  
— **Ibrahim Assane Mayaki**, CEO of AUDA-NEPAD
- *"If your solution works in the field under a tree, without power or internet, you may just have found problem-solution fit in African agriculture."*  
— **Common AgriTech Startup Wisdom (Lean Startup for AgriTech)**

- **"Fall in love with the problem, not the solution."**  
— Uri Levine, Co-founder of Waze
- **"Fall in love with your customer, not your product"**  
— Francis Stevens George, Innovation SL
- **Problem-Solution Fit is about proving that you are solving a meaningful problem for a specific group of people."**  
— Ash Maurya, Author of Running Lean
- **"Customers will tell you what they want, but it's your job to dig deeper and understand what they really need."**  
— Eric Ries, Author of The Lean Startup
- **"Validate the problem before you validate the solution."**  
— Tristan Kromer, Lean Startup Coach
- **"Your first idea is rarely your best. Listen, learn, and iterate until you get it right."**  
— Ash Maurya



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- #1 Mistake of Start ups---  
-Building something  
Nobody wants

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## DON'T BUILD A SOLUTION IN SEARCH OF A PROBLEM

**Start up:** This is the problem I want to solve.

**FSG:** How do you know it's the problem? Who has the problem?

**Start up:** Everyone sir!

**FSG:** Really? I don't.

**Start up:** now, you are not my kind of customer sir.

**FSG:** Ok. Fine. now, describe for me your kind of customers?

**Start up:** Right now, sir?

**FSG:** No,. Next year!

**Start up:** Well they are many....."this *nar* big problem". All I need is capital and I will show you the customer.



## YOUR STRATEGY FOR PROBLEM SOLUTION FITNESS

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Do people actually have the problem that I assume they have?

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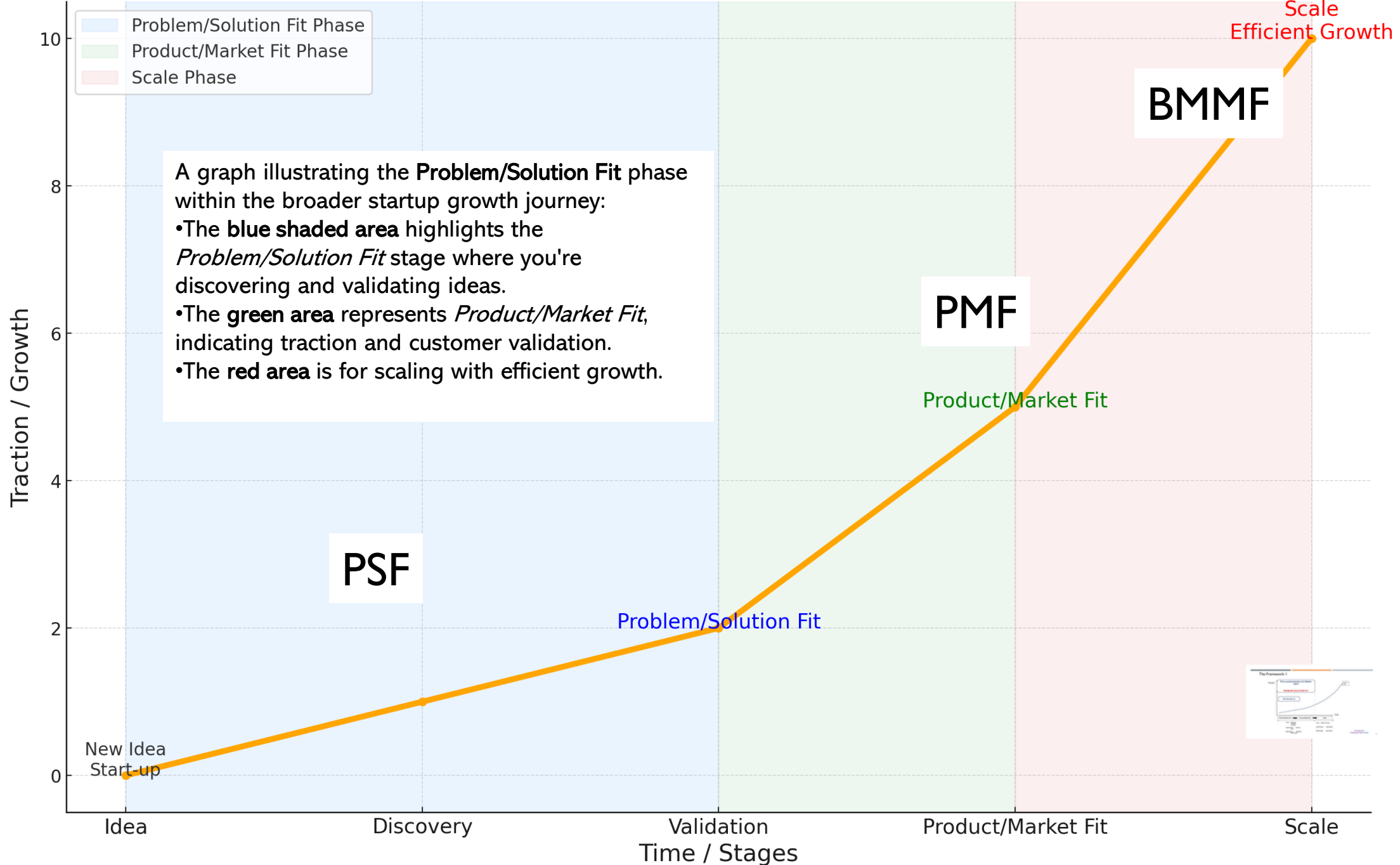
How do they deal with their problem now?

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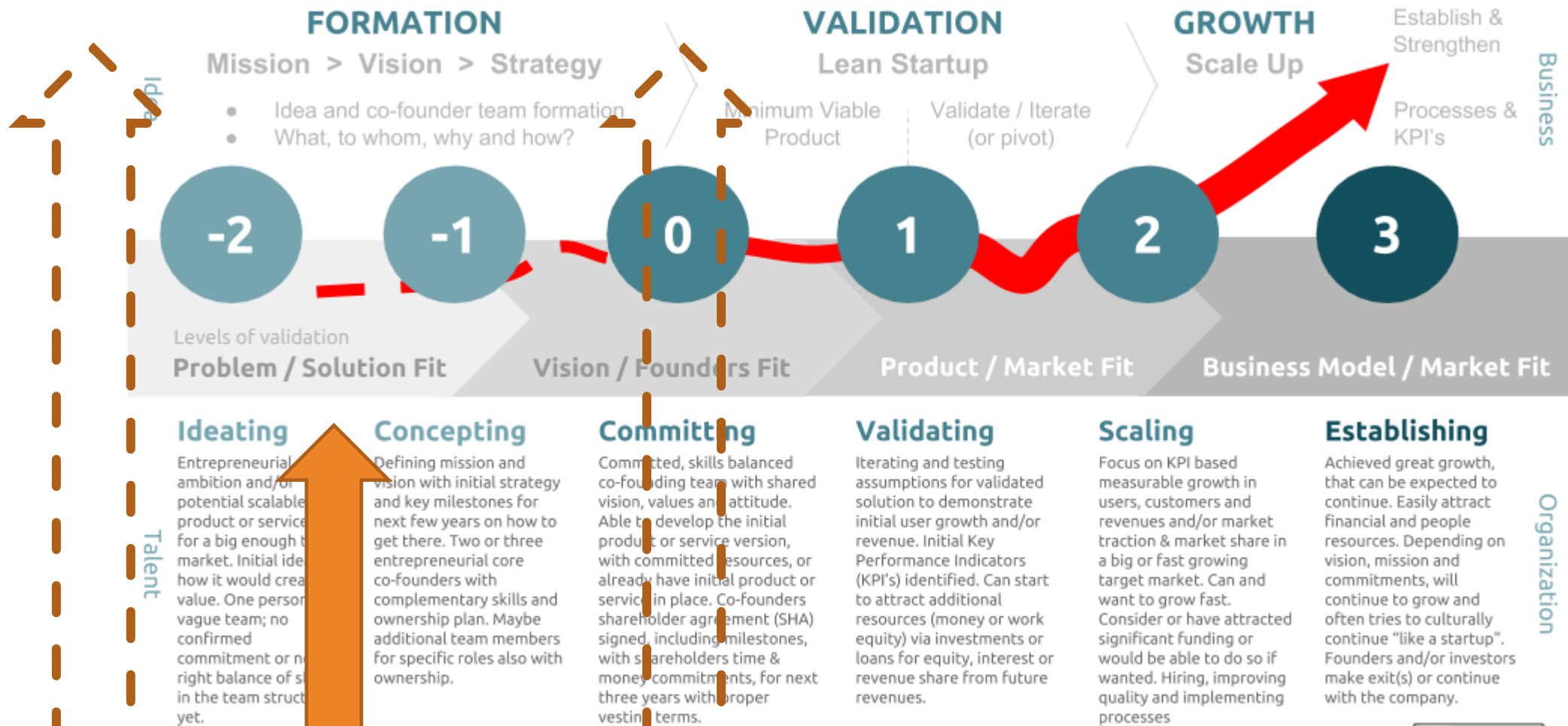
Does my solution make a meaningful difference?

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# Startup Growth Journey: Problem/Solution Fit to Scale



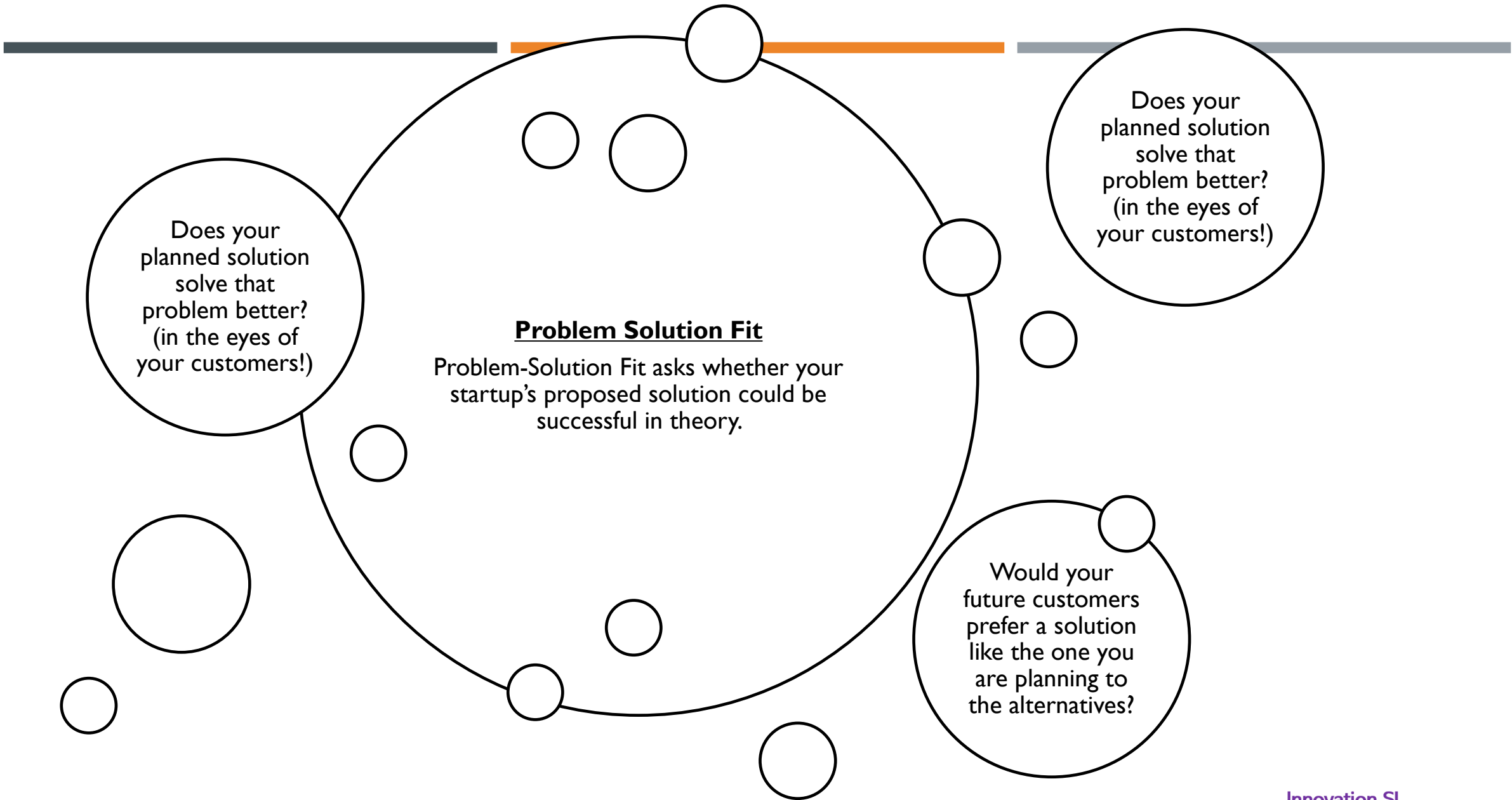
# The Framework 2



Startup Development Phases - from *idea to business* and *talent to organization*.

Version 3.6 - [www.startupcommons.org](http://www.startupcommons.org)





# WHAT IS PROBLEM SOLUTION FIT



Alignment between an existing problem and your proposed solution



Proves that your idea solves a problem worth solving



Comes **before** Product-Market Fit



It's about *validating demand* before building

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## WHY DOES PSF MATTERS

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Reduces the risk of building something nobody wants

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Saves time, money, and resources

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Builds a strong foundation for product development

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Increases investor confidence

# STEPS TO GETTING PROBLEM SOLUTION FIT



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## STEP I - DEFINE THE PROBLEM

01

Who is experiencing the problem?

02

How frequently does it happen?

03

Why is it painful or frustrating?

04

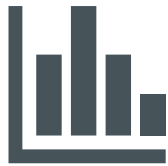
**Real quotes, stories, or data** from potential customers

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## STEP 2 - VALIDATE THE PROBLEM



Customer interviews  
(qualitative data)



Surveys (quantitative  
data)



Observing customer  
behavior



Are customers *actively*  
looking for solutions?

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## STEP 3 - PROPOSE YOUR SOLUTION



Explain how your solution addresses the **core problem**



Focus on **benefits**, not just features



Demonstrate **value and outcomes**



Keep it simple and relatable for your target audience



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# SIGNS YOU HAVE PROBLEM-SOLUTION FIT



Strong **interest and engagement** from potential customers



Customers say **“Yes! This solves my problem!”**



Willingness to **pay, sign up, or try** your product

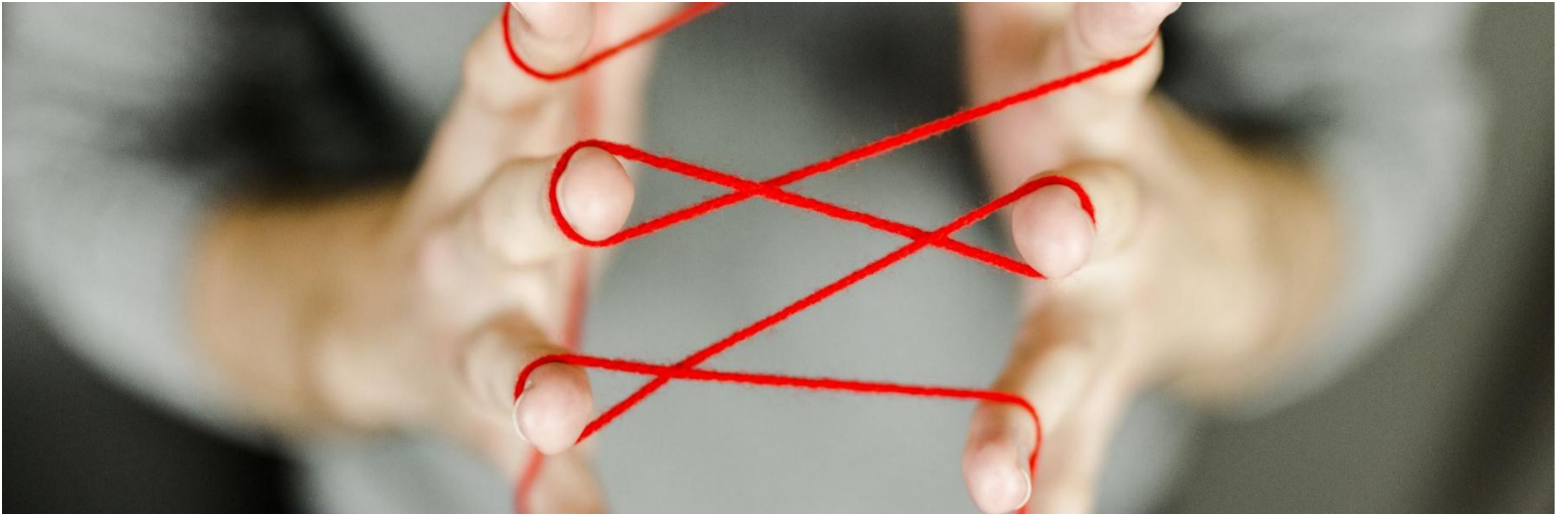


**Referrals and word of mouth** start to happen

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- *"You know you have problem-solution fit when your solution clearly addresses an urgent need, and people care enough to want it solved now."*  
— **Sean Ellis**, Growth Hacker and Author
  - *"Problem-solution fit in AgriTech happens when farmers not only use your solution but rely on it to improve their yield, income, or quality of life."*  
— **AgriTech Insight (paraphrased from AgFunder reports)**
  - *"When people are grabbing the product out of your hands faster than you can make it, you have problem-solution fit."*  
— Marc Andreessen, Co-founder of Andreessen Horowitz

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# PRACTICAL



## START WITH DEFINING THE PROBLEM

- What you think is “the problem” might not be! (See slides- “The Four Whys”)
- Three types of problems:
  - Well defined(problem is one that is very precise and focused)
  - Ill defined(many different routes to finding a solution and need to be careful you are solving the right path)
  - Wicked Problem! ( problems with so many different meanings. Requires you to deep dive, research, know the customer.)



## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Albert Einstein once said, “If I were given one hour to save the planet, I would spend 59 minutes defining the problem and one minute resolving it.

# What makes a Good Problem Statement:

- Focus on the User
- Must be absolute or relative (cannot be unconfirmed, equivocal)
- Make it Manageable



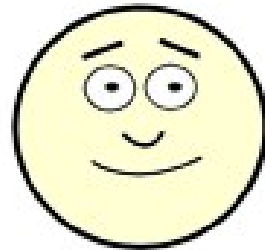
WHERE IS THE PAIN?  
IS THE PROBLEM A «PAIN» OR JUST AN  
INCONVINIENCE?

## Pain Levels



0

Happy  
No Pain



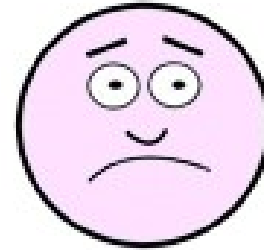
1 - 2

Hurts  
Just a little



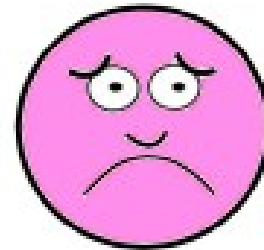
3 - 4

Hurts  
but bearable



5 - 6

Hurts and  
is distracting



7 - 8

Hurts  
a lot



9 - 10

Unbearable  
Pain



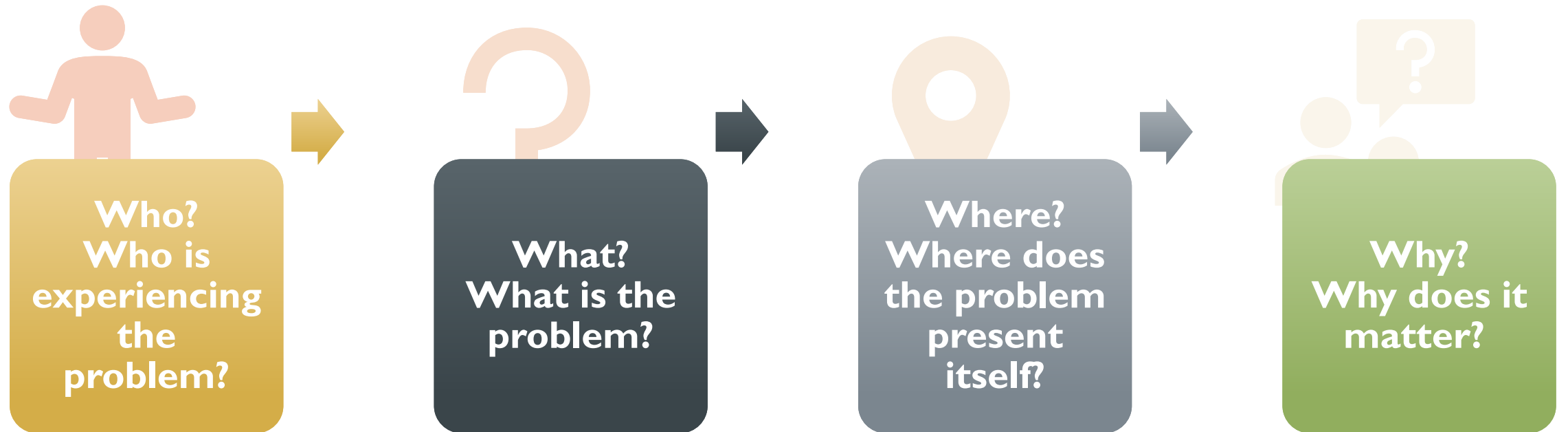
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ASKING WHY, WHY,  
WHY?

# THE KEY TO GETTING TO THE PROBLEM



# THE FOUR «WS»



# THE FIVE WHYS EXAMPLE

01

**Why is she  
not eating  
healthily?**

02

**Why does  
she order  
takeaway  
everyday?**

03

**Why are the  
fridge and  
cupboards  
empty?**

04

**Why hasn't  
she been  
grocery  
shopping?**

05

**Why doesn't  
she have  
time?**

# THE FIVE WHYS

Question	Answer
<b>Why is she not eating healthily?</b>	The answer leads to the next question
<b>Why does she .....?</b>	The answer leads to the next question
<b>Why .....?</b>	The answer leads to the next question
<b>Why ....?</b>	The answer leads to the next question
<b>Why....?</b>	

# PROBLEM SOLUTION FIT CANVASS

- **Customer State fit:** to make sure you understand your target group, their limitations and their currently available solutions, against which you are going to compete.
- **Problem-Behavior fit:** to help you filter out the noise and identify the most urgent and frequent problems, understand the real reasons behind them and see which behavior supports it. Is this behavior weak or infrequent — is it a problem worth solving?
- **Communication-Channel fit:** to help you sharpen your communication with strong triggers, emotional messaging and reaching customers via the right channels.
- **Solution guess:** translate all the validated data you have gathered into a solution that fits the customer state and his/her limitations, solves a real problem and taps into the common behavior of your target group.



## •Who is your customer?

- What limits your customer from acting when a problem occurs?  
E.g. Spending power, network connection, available devices.
- What solutions are available to the customer when he or she is facing the problem?
- What has he/she tried in the past?
- What are the pros/cons of existing solutions?

## •What problem do you solve for your customer?

- There could be more than one, explore it.
- How often does this problem occur?
  - What is the cause of every problem on the list?
  - Etc etc etc

- What triggers customer to act?
- Which emotions do people feel before / after this problem is resolved?

- Trying to find a new solution** to an existing problem,
- Working on an existing solution** (exploring growth strategies, problem with activation or solution adoption)

# VALIDATION

## Validate Problem

- Do they care?
- Do they need it?
- Do they have a budget for it?
- **Who is really THEY?**

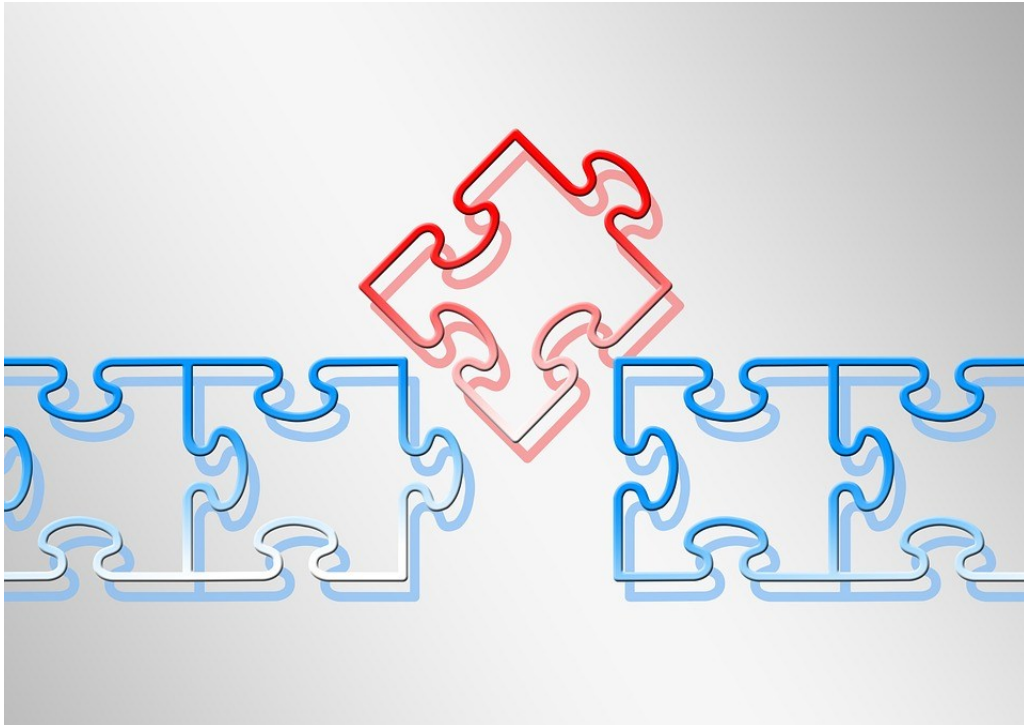
## Validate Solution

- Does our solution really solve their problem?
- Do they understand the solution?
- Would they pay for it?



## EXERCISE

- I walk down from Leicester Peak to the US Embassy to find a taxi. I wait one hr and there was no taxi. I then walk 20 mins towards IMAT. At IMAT I see lots of taxis. There are also lots of people. I waited for an hour before I got a taxi.
- Give as many reasons as possible why I could not get a taxi at the US Embassy.
- You have spotted a business opportunity: **Many young working professional who want to eat healthily but find it difficult to do so. Answer with the Five Whys.**



# Problem Solution Fit

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## MY TAKE

**Most of the entrepreneurs I meet have a great idea. They are in love with their idea so much** that their secret desire would be to find a way for their “customers” to fall in love with it too. Some even say we need to “educate”, “sensitize” the customer so they see they need for my product. Some arrogant ones even say “the customer does not what is good for them because they are largely uneducated”.

There are many potential obstacles to a good Fit that often have little to do with the solution itself. For example, legislation, switching costs are simply too high, cultural barriers. Despite the obvious potential benefits, customers will not use the product / adopt the solution.

**There is ONLY one way to validate Problem Solution Fit, and that is to talk to prospective customers.**

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## MY FINAL ADVICE

- Drop your Assumptions! Go Ask! Go Find Out!
- Find an MVS- Minimum Viable Segment
- Understand their underserved needs- their Pain!  
(yagba)
- Align the above with your Value Proposition.



# WHO ARE WE (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Innovation SL Ltd (Innosl) is an Entrepreneurship Support Organization (ESO) and an Innovation & Technology Management company established in January 2017.

Our major focus is building a vibrant Entrepreneurial Ecosystem that will incubate and accelerate disruptive, high-growth and value creating Start up entrepreneurs & SMEs in Sierra Leone. At the same time contributing to Human Capital Development.

Gen Global Sierra Leone Affiliate.



SIERRA LEONE

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# WHAT WE DO



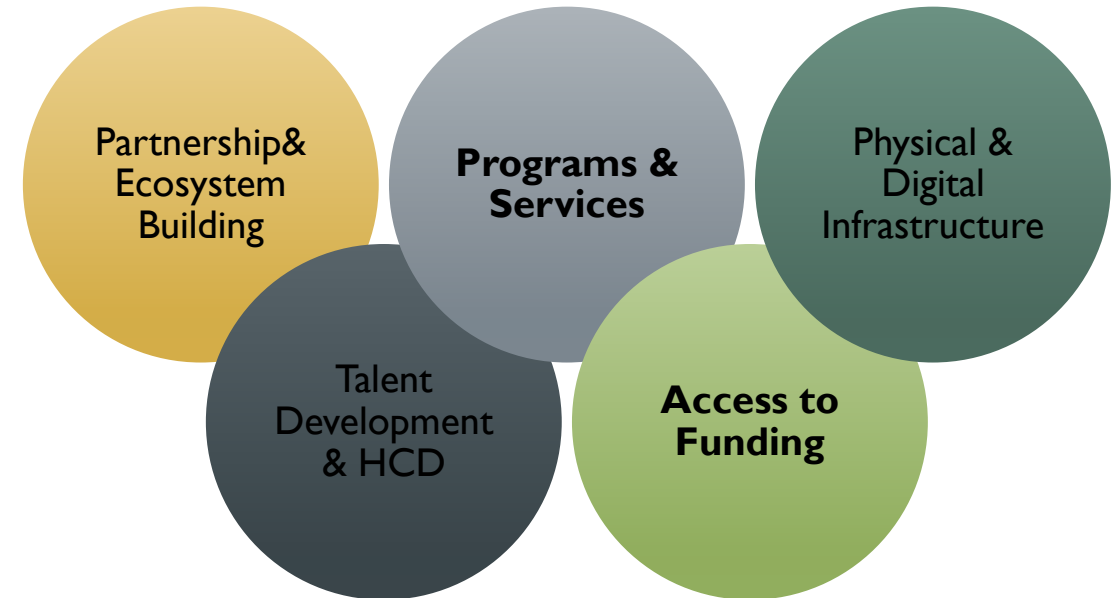
## Mission

- Enabling Sierra Leone's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem to source & develop impact start-ups and scale-ups, to contribute towards the development of 'a better and more sustainable future' for all Sierra Leoneans.

## Our Vision

- An Entrepreneurial Ecosystem where Sierra Leone's largest companies, academic institutions, MDAs and development partners interact with ambitious entrepreneurs hungry for success; with talented individuals, graduates and alumni of entrepreneurial organisations providing a strong source of 'cultural and intellectual capital'. All fuelled by highly networked and experienced mentoring and capital supported by our incubator and accelerator

## Innovation SL An Entrepreneurship Support Organization



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# OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS & GOALS

## **ENABLE**

A dynamic  
Entrepreneurial  
Ecosystem

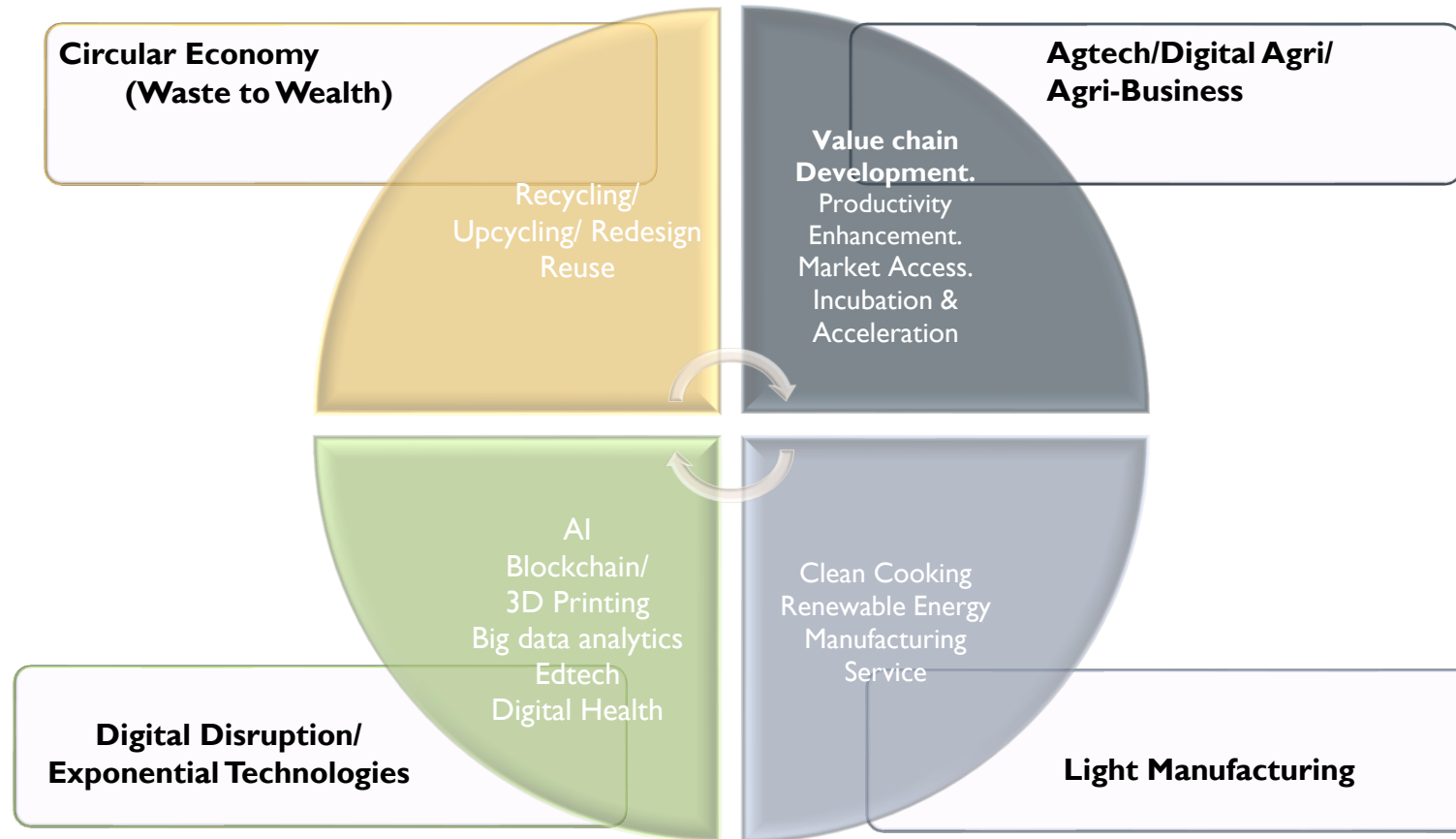
## **ENGAGE**

To support  
Newcomers

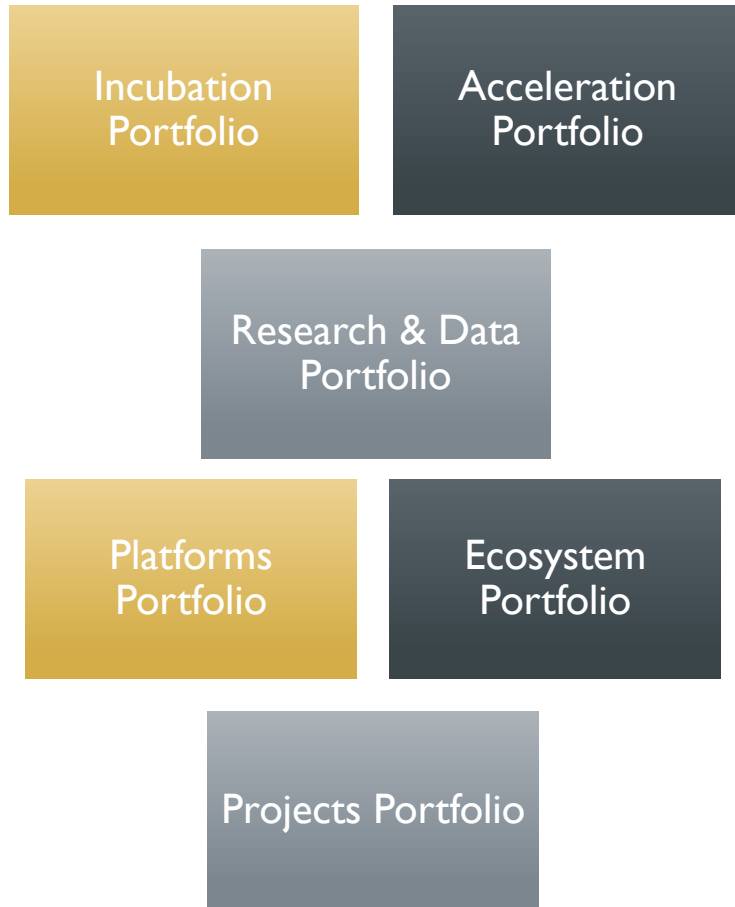
## **DIALOGUE**

Best policies –  
growth, job  
creation and  
social inclusion

# 4 DISRUPTIVE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



## OUR PORTFOLIOS



## OUR MAIN AREA OF EXPERTISE



# OUR DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Salonecrowdfunder- Crowdfunding  
platform

[www.salonecrowdfunder.com](http://www.salonecrowdfunder.com)

Innosl Digital- online Business  
Diagnostic Tools;

[www.innosldigital.com](http://www.innosldigital.com)

Startupsierraleone

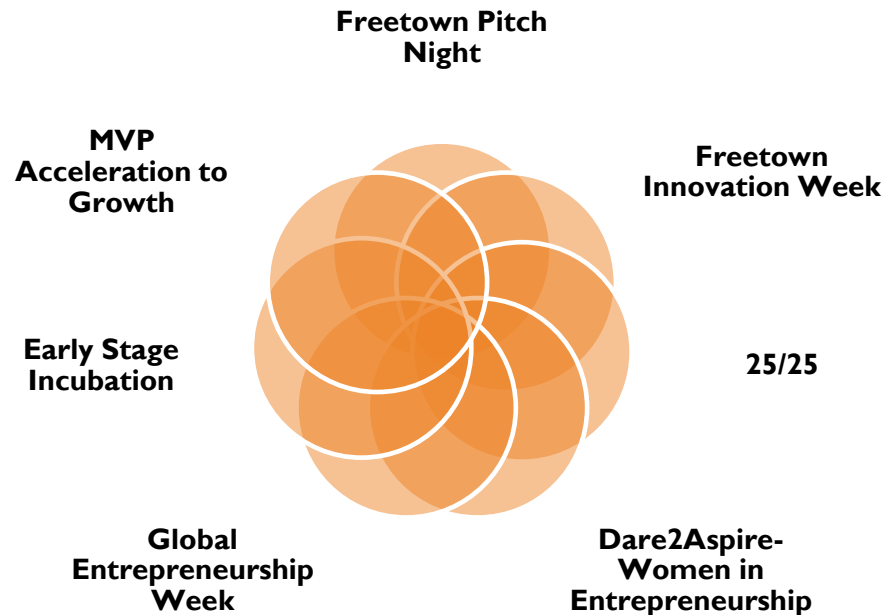
[www.startupsl.com](http://www.startupsl.com)

E-learning Platform

[www.awansabi.com](http://www.awansabi.com)

# PROGRAMS

## Own Programs



## Managed Programs

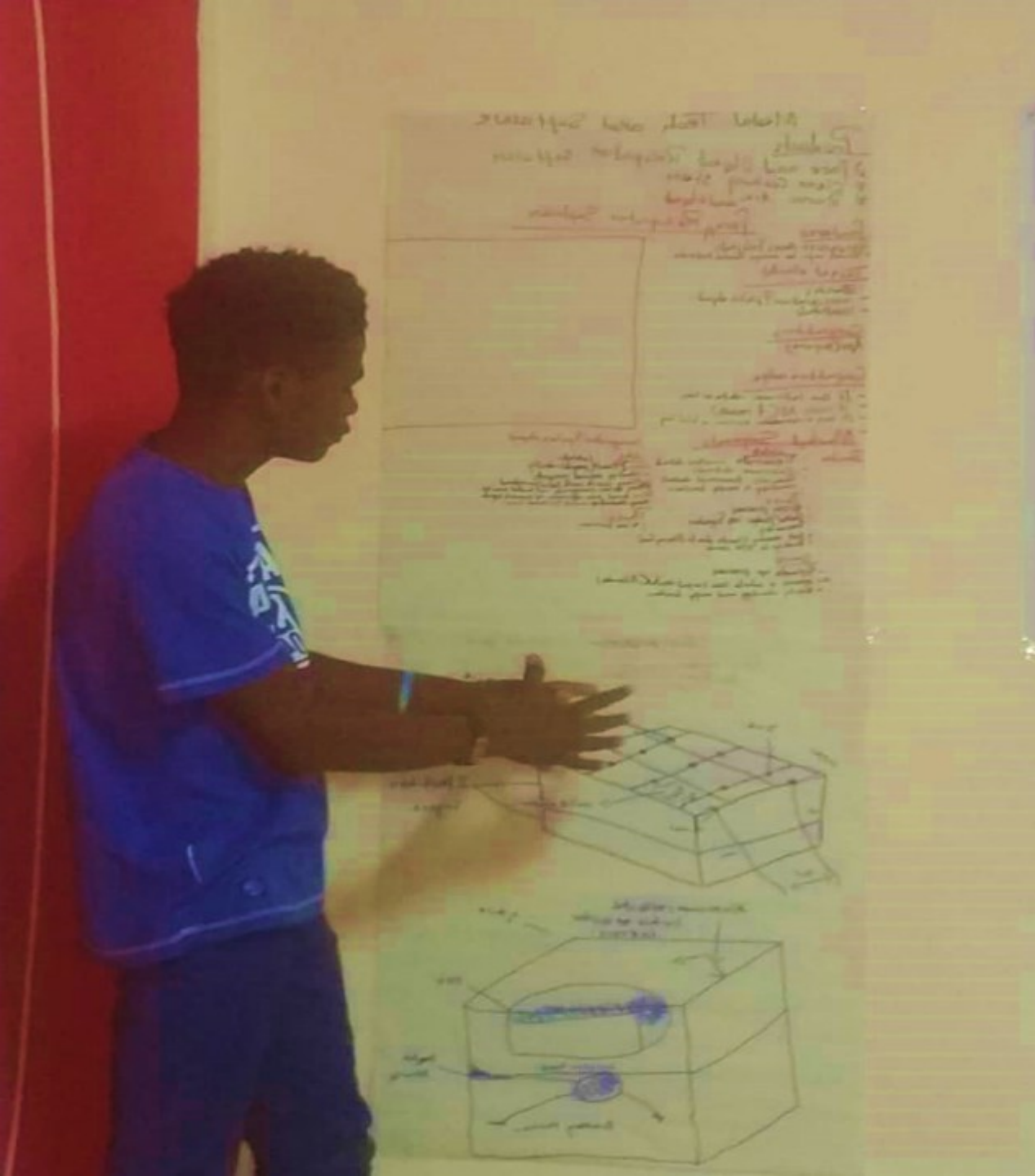
Orange Social Venture Prize

Entrepreneurship World Cup

Future Agro Challenge

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT





## WE ARE GOOD AT

Identifying, Developing and Growing High Growth, Value Creating and Disruptive Start Ups.

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP



We Believe: Entrepreneurship is a key source of economic revolution, job creation and business development; hence, it is pivotal to attract the young and educated to become entrepreneurs.

High Growth entrepreneurs will attract investment, leading to the creation of employment; generating economic growth and facilitating social inclusion.

*“Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry.”*

— **Bill Drayton**, Founder of Ashoka

*“Africa’s youth are not a problem to be solved but the greatest asset to be invested in.”*

— **Akinwumi Adesina**, President of the African Development Bank

“Countries with the greatest needs, present the biggest opportunities.”

“Nor sidom wait for help. Na you hand di power deh fo change your life an country!”

*“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”*

— **Nelson Mandela**

*“Africa’s entrepreneurs are its greatest hope for economic transformation.”*

— **Strive Masiyiwa**, Founder of Econet

*“If you are young and have an idea, now is the time to build it. The world is more open to youth innovation than ever before.”*

— **Mark Zuckerberg**, Founder of Facebook

# OUR APPROACH



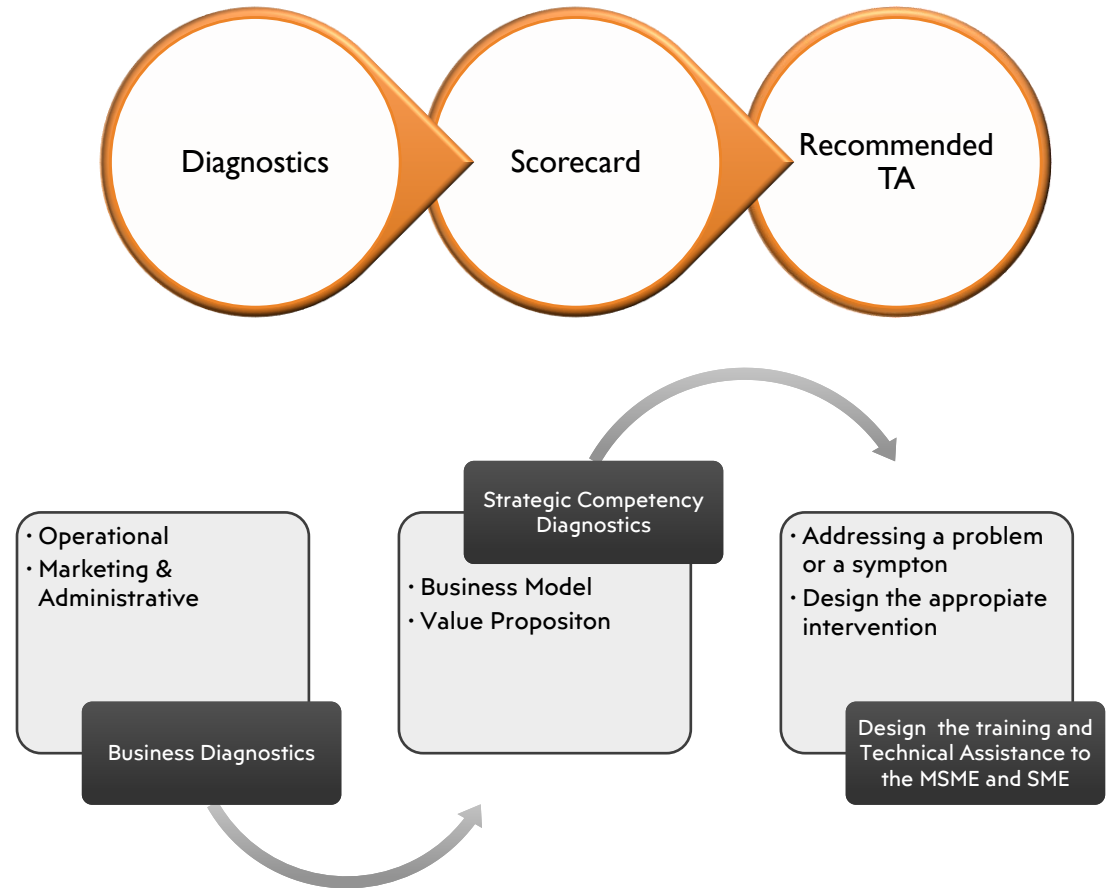
At the core of Innovation SL's incubation program is the development of the MSMEs & SMEs **Business Model and their Operational Model from a Value Chain Perspective.**



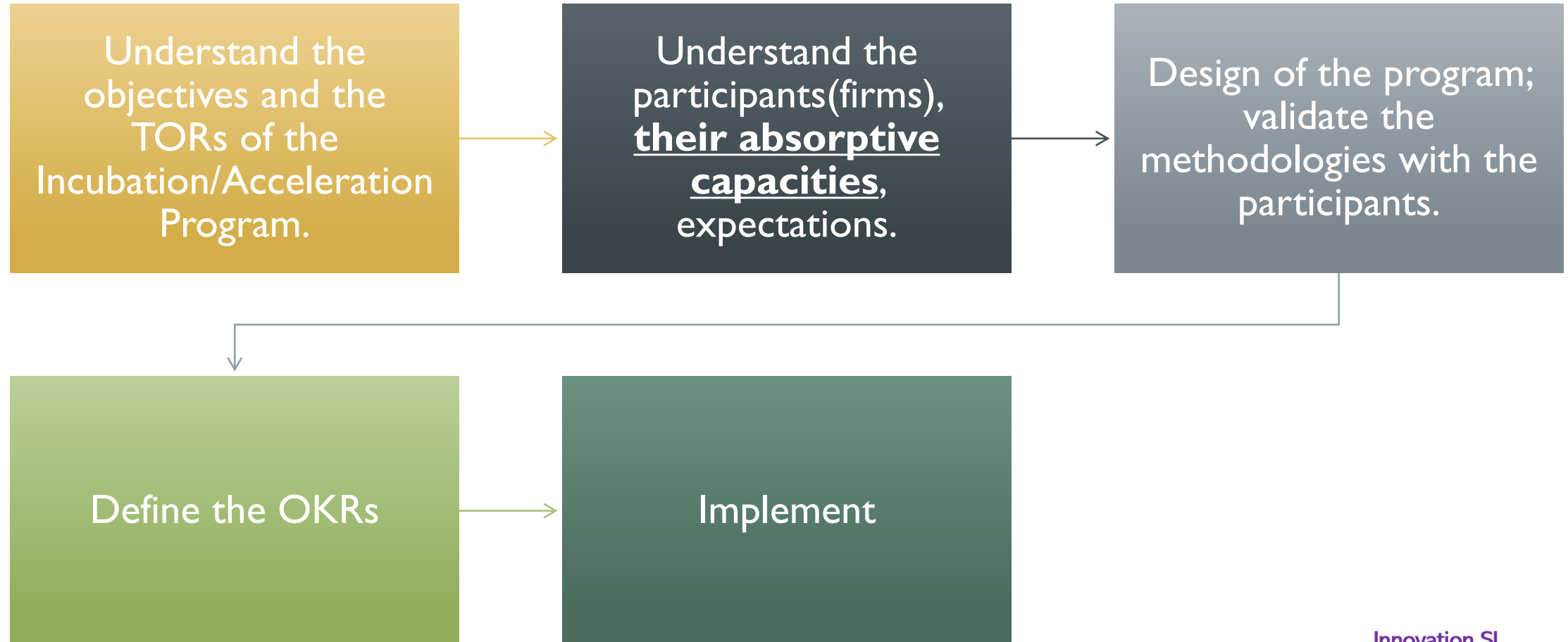
Therefore, it is an **individual approach**, based on the diagnostics results and the absorptive capacity of the entrepreneur.



Further our Incubation program leverages the entire Ecosystem (enabling environment, Finance, Infrastructure, Networking Asset and Human capital).

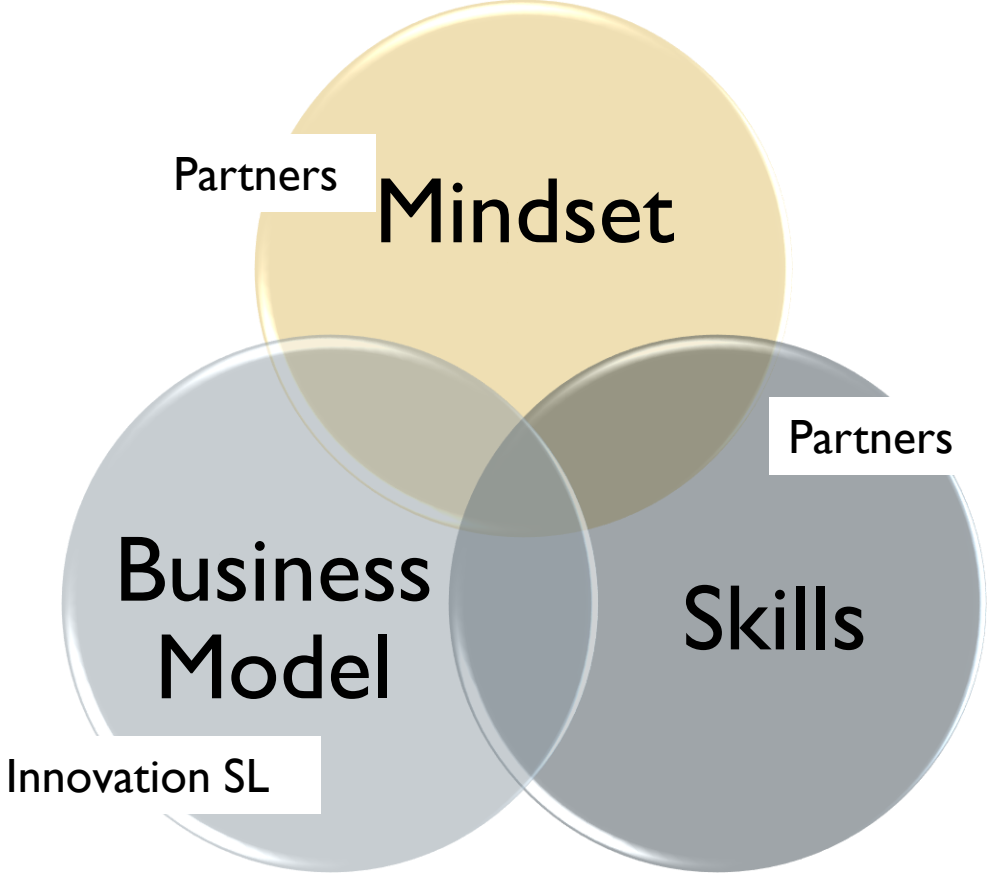


## SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL



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# FOCUS ON DEVELOPING THE BUSINESS MODEL. LET PARTNERS DO THE OTHER STUFF



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# THANK YOU

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Innovation SL

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