



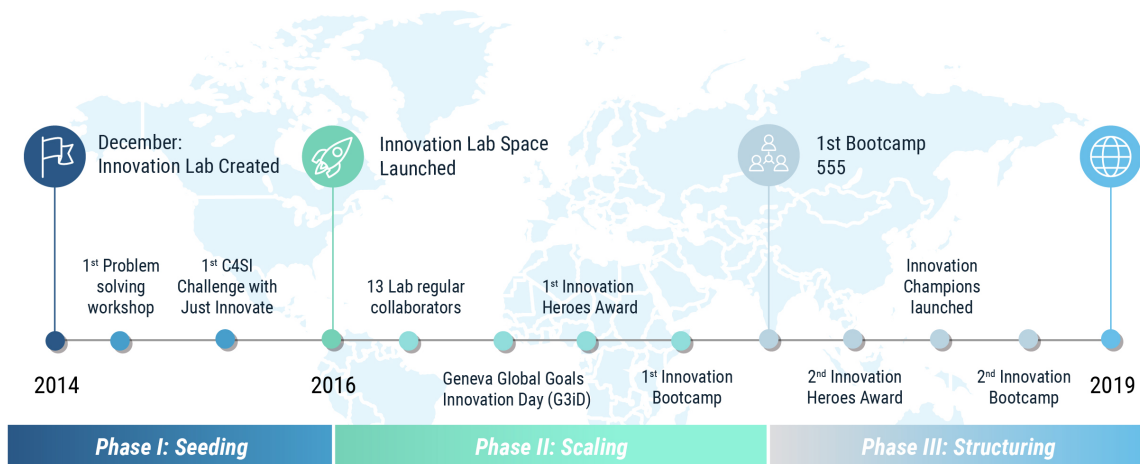
International Trade Center (ITC): The ITC Innovation Lab

Under the joint mandate of development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the International Trade Centre (ITC) was established in 1964 as the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations.¹ It is the only international agency fully dedicated to supporting the internationalization of MSMEs with a focus on expanding trade opportunities and the aim of fostering sustainable and inclusive development.² Under the vision of Good Trade, ITC's mission is to enhance inclusive and sustainable growth and development in developing countries, especially least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition through improving the international competitiveness of MSMEs.

ITC is structured into the offices of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director, and four divisions: Division of Programme Support; Division of Country Programmes; Division of Market Development; Division of Enterprises and Institutions.³ The Executive Director reports to Secretary-General of the UNCTAD and the Director-General of the WTO.⁴ ITC has around 315 employees with 85 nationalities,⁵ the smallest of the organizations in our case studies in terms of people.

The Organizational Innovation Journey

ITC TIMELINE



Phase I: Seeding

¹ http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracen.org/Content/About_ITC/Corporate_Documents/Annual-Report-2017-web.pdf

² http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracen.org/Content/About_ITC/Corporate_Documents/Strategic_Plan/Strategic plan 2018-21-web.pdf

³ <http://www.intracen.org/itc/about/how-itc-works/itc-structure/>

⁴ <http://www.intracen.org/itc/about/how-itc-works/itc-structure/>

⁵ http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracen.org/Content/About_ITC/Corporate_Documents/ITC_Infographics-AR2016-2pg-web.pdf



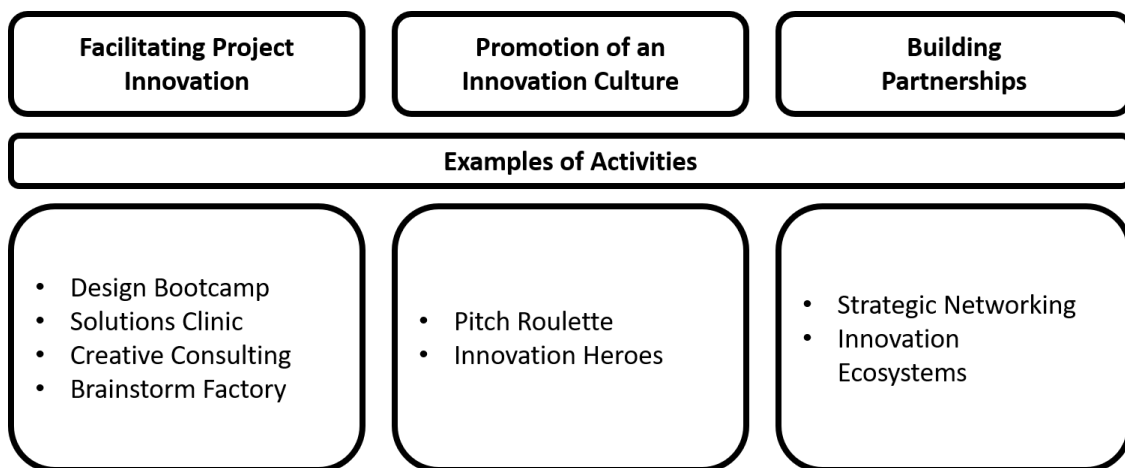
The idea of innovation became a popular topic around ITC in 2014 and the birth of the ITC innovation lab was a natural step given the nature of ITC’s work and culture. A small group within ITC gathered and brainstormed ideas around how to integrate innovation into ITC’s daily work. The idea was that there is a need in the system for incentives for thinking outside the box. The small group consisted of 3 people: Viviane Marcelino and Raimund Moser, Advisers at the Office of the Director - Division of Country Programmes, and Raphaël Dard, Head of the SME Trade Academy – Division of Market Development. With the growing momentum and interest in innovation, the ITC Innovation Lab was created under the mission of unleashing the full potential of creativity and innovation. It was positioned under the Division of Country Programmes in the Office of the Director. The group met once a week (a tradition that would continue), and did most of the Innovation Lab work in their free time on top of their regular positions.

This first phase was devoted to exploring the needs and building up the momentum for innovation. During this time, the lab hosted its first Problem solving workshop and its first C4SI Challenge with Just Innovate.

Phase II: Scaling

In 2016, the Innovation Lab officially launched a physical space and obtained funding from the ITC trust fund. This phase was to test a full service offering. There was again strong top down support for renewal and experimentation. The ITC Innovation lab was an ecosystem which not only provided people in ITC with the space, tools, but also supported them to be creative and innovative in their daily work.

The ITC’s Innovation lab was a formalized unit; however, its uniqueness came from the nature of its operation. It ran activities purely on a voluntary basis in all three following domains:



These three domains worked hand in hand to make transformational changes across ITC with the goal of becoming the innovation champion in the organization.

During this time, the members of ITC’s Innovation Lab were key in creating and shaping the Geneva Global Goals Innovation Day (G3ID). To speed up the accomplishment of the SDGs, this event brought together the Geneva ecosystem in a different, more dynamic and collaborative format of co-creation factories and cross-org



workshops. The idea flowed directly from the movement towards innovation in the International Organizations. This was highly seen as a first win for the Lab as it effectively showed that, “Innovation and collaboration could radically accelerate the SDGs,” Adriana De Oro – Lab member - described. There were about 50 organizations which participated in the solutions fair and four streams of workshops called co-creation factory. The volunteers also showed that they were able to organize such an event, on top of also performing well in their roles in the organization.

In 2017, ITC published its Strategic Plan for the period 2018-2021. ‘Trade Routes to Sustainable and Inclusive Development’ was the product of an extensive consultative process involving internal workshops with ITC staff, an online survey of all stakeholders and discussions with country partners and funders. This strategic plan was complemented by ITC’s belief in constant innovation and creativity to respond to demand. ITC’s capability to be nimble, adaptable and innovative in a fast-changing global environment to make its work more competitive.

Also during this incubation phase, the Innovation Lab hosted its first Innovation Bootcamp and first Innovation Heroes award. The Bootcamp was hosted in October 2017 and included five initiatives from within ITC. The Innovation Heroes award was developed as an annual event aimed at showcasing ITC’s innovative practices and innovators both within the organization as well as to the ecosystem.

Due to exponential synergy created by the lab, the following results were achieved in 2017:

- 1000 people learned about innovation in trade
- One pilot was co-created with donors and partners
- Internal process improvements were triggered
- 200 people improved their capacity to innovate
- Six projects, innovation initiatives, incubated
- Initiatives across the house boosted with innovation lab inputs

The ITC innovation lab also identified a formula for growing innovation – a combination of 1) Manpower, 2) Funding and 3) Knowledge management system.

Phase III: Structuring

From the beginning of 2018 to mid-2019, the Innovation Lab continued to reinforce and position itself as a facilitator of Innovation in the organization. It was growing bigger and needed to deliver more in terms of its impact on the internal culture.

In 2018, the lab hosted its Second Innovation Bootcamp, the Second Innovation Heroes award, ITC Bootcamp 555 and the launch of the Innovation Champions. Bootcamp 555 was a way for ITC Innovation Lab to introduce its employees to the agile method of Human Centered Design through a Five-day Sprint with Five teams. This event was run in collaboration with SparksWorks, a local innovation consulting company.

The Innovation Champions was an initiative to make innovation more accessible at ITC. As Katie Schlinder, ITC Innovation Lab volunteer and Associate Programme Officer at ITC, and Elena Mayer-Besting, Project Manager and Associate Programme Officer, wrote, “From the beginning, our vision of innovation was built around the



idea that innovation comes from within all of us and that innovation must not be delegated to a small group of similar people ‘who are into innovation.’ Yet, the Innovation Lab kept attracting similar types of people: primarily young, junior, female, creative-types, who are comfortable with post-its and modular furniture.” To overcome this challenge, the lab tried to engage senior colleagues and tap into existing internal expertise. The team decided they, “needed credible champions of innovation, who could show tangible positive results of innovation, who could influence others to believe in fresh thinking and new ways of working; and who would be able to provide us with the expertise to become a more effective innovation lab.”⁶ So the Innovation Champions programme was launched in August 2018 to engage advisers, idea generators and influencers for innovation within the organization. Champions would either act as advisors to new projects (Shakers) or be active in innovating new projects/processes (Makers). Five inter-disciplinary Innovation Champions were chosen in the first year, each with a focal point within the Innovation Lab.

The Innovation Lab kept working further towards incorporating innovation into the corporate strategy team. This would include adding Key Performance Indicators, such as measuring the number of innovations in house, into the operational plan of the organization. It showed that the work that the Lab was doing has been a source of inspiration in house. In 2019, after creating a three years strategy, and an operational plan, the funding from the Trust fund was increased as a proof of the validation in-house.

Other initiatives included innovation sprints and panels such the Sprint for Self Reliance, an 8-hour sprint workshop in which twenty selected participants generated, developed and presented digital solutions to develop market-based livelihoods for vulnerable migrants and forcibly displaced communities with a special focus on the MENA region. The winners were announced during the panel discussion the following day.

The lab would also be hosting the Third edition of the Innovation Heroes awards. Awards to be given this year included “The Natural Innovation of the Year,” “The Ecosystem Builder of the Year,” and “The Innovation of the Year.”

Challenges

After over four years of running the volunteer-based innovation lab, ITC had seen some significant changes in the mindset towards innovation. Not only had the headquarters in Geneva allocated an entire Innovation Lab space for workshops and trainings, but the leadership at the top was becoming increasingly supportive of the innovation team.

That said, there were some challenges that the team was still facing in 2018. First, there was a perceived growing resistance against the Lab from some people in the organisation. This led to a reflection inside the Lab about the sources of this resistance and how could the Lab communicate better its results and impact.

The other challenge was that the volunteer-based structure created a strain on the ownership and resources. People who wanted to dedicate more time to innovation had to balance their current responsibilities and roles at the same time. While this had benefits, in that it meant that innovation was never centralized or formalized as in some other organizations, it also resulted in a lack of time and manpower when needed. In the spring of 2019,

⁶ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/beyond-buzzword-holiday-inspiration-katherine-katie-schlinder/>



more resources were allocated to the lab and two of the members had 50% of their time mandated to the lab, particularly for monitoring and evaluation, ecosystem building, communication and events. As Adriana described, “The challenge regarding creating even a 50% mandated position meant that people believe you will now be taking on the whole innovation work – whereas the goal was still to have everyone in the organization doing innovation as part of their role.” Because of this, Adriana described that the organization was not questioning the nature of volunteers and would maintain that structure. “We do not want to have ‘innovation people’ and ‘non-innovation people’,” Adriana explained. By summer 2019, there were eleven other volunteers also part of the lab. These were fluid, meaning that they would come and go and the structure was horizontal, with everyone consulted on strategic decisions. There was excitement in the lab at the added resources and the potential for expanding the scope of their activities.