

Accelerating Strategic Innovation: A Practical Framework Aligned with ISO 56001

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Abstract: This paper presents a practical framework for accelerating strategic innovation through the systematic implementation of Innovation Management Systems aligned with ISO 56001. Drawing on combined expertise from Perfect Link and Amplify, we outline assessment-led approaches that help organisations move from fragmented innovation activities to coordinated, sustainable capability development. The framework addresses common implementation challenges and provides actionable execution strategies for practitioners seeking to boost innovation performance while meeting international standards requirements.

1. Introduction

Innovation is no longer a “soft” topic. When the 2025 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences recognised innovation and creativity as drivers of economic growth, it signalled a wider shift in how innovation is being understood at the organisational level (Nobel Foundation, 2024). It is increasingly recognised as a capability that can be designed, governed, and developed systematically.

For organisations, this changes the conversation. The question is no longer whether innovation matters, but how it is enabled, sustained, and scaled across the organisation. That requires structure, not just ideas or initiatives. This is where Innovation Management Systems (IMS) and standards such as ISO 56001 become relevant. They provide a shared language and framework for translating innovation ambition into a repeatable organisational practice.

See Appendix A for background on the ISO 56000 family of standards.

Background on the Authors

This paper represents a collaboration between two organisations at the forefront of innovation management practice and standards development.

Amplify is based in Stockholm, Sweden, engaging globally at the forefront of innovation management through practice, research, and standardisation. Dr. Magnus Karlsson, a global authority on Innovation Management with over 30 years of commercial experience, is a partner and advisor at Amplify AB. He is a key contributor to the ISO 56000 family of innovation standards, an Advisor to the Japan Innovation Network, Adjunct Professor at KTH Royal Institute of Technology (2011–25), chairs the national expert group on Innovation Management at the SIS Swedish Institute for Standards, and serves as Project Manager for Innovation Management System at RISE Research Institutes of Sweden.

Perfect Link focuses on helping organisations design and mature their Innovation Management Systems so innovation is structured, aligned, and sustainable across the business. The work is led by Suzanne Lynch, Founder of Perfect Link Ltd and an Innovation Management Specialist with over 25 years of international experience across technology, strategy, and operations. Her work centers on governance and capability development, supporting organisations as they move from fragmented activity to a structured, organisation-wide approach aligned with ISO 56001. Suzanne is a Certified Innovation Management Professional and Auditor based on ISO 56000 and ISO 56001, and a regular contributor to international innovation forums and standards discussions (Perfect Link, 2025).

2. The Need for Systematic Approaches

Innovation management only becomes effective when it is treated as a system, not as a single initiative or process (Amplify, 2024).

ISO 56001 is the international standard that specifies the requirements for implementing and continually improving an innovation management system. By managing innovation activities more effectively in line with ISO 56001, organisations can realise more value with fewer resources. It is not only an option but also a responsibility.

3. The Assessment-Led Approach

Why Start with Assessment?

An assessment-led approach aligns with the prepare, conduct, and conclude phases outlined in ISO 56004 Innovation Management Assessment - Guidance. This approach drives alignment with ISO 56001 requirements while providing organisations with a clear baseline for improvement (Amplify, 2024).

The benefits of taking an assessment-led approach include:

- More effective outcomes through structured gap identification.
- Enhanced innovation capability through targeted improvements.
- Understanding and acceptance from stakeholders through transparent reporting.
- High degree of implementation success through prioritised action planning.

- A more flexible and holistic innovation management approach.
- Efficient execution through a clear implementation plan.

The Assessment Process

The assessment approach follows these key steps:

1. Define assessment purpose, scope, and expectations, including criteria.
2. Identify internal stakeholders, including senior management representatives.
3. Determine assessment tools and other resources.
4. Define the innovation intent (ambition level), including prioritised innovation opportunities and challenges.
5. Conduct the innovation management assessment (current situation).
6. Determine and validate the desired capabilities and ambition level.
7. Identify and prioritise gaps and actions.
8. Develop the implementation plan with responsibilities and milestones.
9. Set cadence meetings to monitor and evaluate progress.

Establishing a Baseline

Beyond gap identification, the assessment establishes a clause-by-clause baseline for ISO 56001, helpful for communicating and raising awareness of innovation capability maturity levels. For most organisations this is a first, and it yields welcome insight into the current state.

Summarising the themes and feedback from stakeholders during the assessment process lays a foundation for dialogue on innovation priorities, gaps, and the critical themes that emerge from the survey.

This baseline becomes the reference point for measuring future improvements against the ISO 56001 clauses and creates the IMS KPI dashboard for senior leadership reporting (Perfect Link, 2025).

4. Practical Execution Strategies

Success Factors for Implementation

Based on extensive practical experience, the following success factors are critical when embarking on an ISO 56001 assessment, implementation, and certification program:

1. **Culture of Innovation** — Promoting shared values, beliefs, and behaviours that support openness to change, risk-taking, and collaboration. Future-focused leaders in the organization should act as role models and demonstrate curiosity and courage to foster this culture.
2. **External and Internal Context** — Comprehensively identifying factors that can influence innovation activities to determine the relevant innovation opportunity and challenge areas. The purpose is to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

3. **Stakeholder Management** — Understanding key external and internal stakeholders who can impact or be impacted by innovation activities. The purpose, for example, is to align expectations, identify available grant aids, and agree on applicable performance indicators.
4. **People** — Ensuring roles and responsibilities are assigned and understood. A carefully selected core team with the right innovation management competencies is critical. Choose wisely who is selected for the extended team to support the assessment. The knowledge levels of the core team, extended team, and the organization are success factors that impact speed of implementation.
5. **Structure and Governance** — Designing appropriate organisational structures and decision-making processes.
6. **Resource Mapping and Budget** — Allocating financial and human resources effectively.
7. **KPIs — Desired Outcomes** — Establish and agree on both financial and non-financial performance indicators with your leadership team early in the project.

Defining Innovation Intent, Policy, and Strategy

A practical workshop with the core and extended teams helps organisations determine their innovation intent, policy, and strategy in alignment with ISO 56001 requirements, providing a structured forum for these critical discussions.

Innovation Intent expresses how innovation activities can contribute to the organisation's purpose. It identifies the prioritised opportunities and challenges that inform the scope of the innovation management system.

Innovation Policy is established by top management and demonstrates leadership commitment. It provides a framework for setting innovation objectives and should be communicated, understood, and applied throughout the organisation.

Innovation Strategy expresses the purpose of innovation activities, is based on the intent, and aligned with the policy, is flexible and adaptable, and is treated as a live document that evolves with the organisation. An innovation strategy typically includes, the strategic innovation objectives and focus areas, and an outline of implementation actions, including governance considerations.

Tools for Developing Your Innovation Strategy

The following essential tools support the situation analysis as input to strategy development:

- **PESTLE** (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental) is a tool for understanding the external forces shaping innovation efforts.
- **SWOT** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is a tool for providing clarity for innovation strategy choices.

- **VUCA** (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) and **BANI** (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) are frameworks for understanding challenging conditions facing organizations, informing risk analysis and decision-making.
- **SCIPAB** (Situation, Complication, Implication, Position, Action, Benefit) is a tool for critical thinking and communications.

External opportunities and threats from the PESTLE analysis, when integrated into the SWOT framework, create a clearer decision-oriented approach that is not just descriptive. It aids strategy storytelling and leadership buy-in, making innovation efforts more explicitly visible within the organisation's strategic narrative. (Perfect Link, 2025)

5. Building the Innovation Management System (IMS)

Documentation Requirements

An assessment-led approach facilitates establishing your IMS through systematic documentation. Gathering evidence as part of the assessment helps build and establish a document control system in accordance with the IMS structure.

Key documentation elements by clause of ISO 56001 include:

- **Clause 4:** Innovation intent, scope, SWOT/PESTLE, market, and stakeholder analysis. VUCA/BANI for external understanding of your context.
- **Clause 5:** Innovation policy, strategy, roles and responsibilities, communications plan, executive dashboard, culture documentation.
- **Clause 6:** Risk register and action plans, innovation objectives, portfolio selection criteria, governance documentation (SCIPAB).
- **Clause 7:** Training plan, including knowledge and skills matrices, training records, awareness and communications plan, intellectual property management, document control register.
- **Clause 8:** Five core innovation processes, initiatives and projects list and charters, innovation idea register.
- **Clause 9:** Internal audit schedule and report templates, management review templates, KPI dashboard.
- **Clause 10:** Non-conformance process.

The Executive Dashboard

The assessment results can be transformed into an Executive Dashboard that serves as a tool for communicating the current state and measuring progress. This dashboard serves dual purposes:

- IMS Management Review Dashboard for ISO 56001 (a clause 9 requirement).
- Innovation performance evaluation readout to top management.

ISO 56001 requires a management review dashboard; the organisation defines the cadence of this review. The assessment provides a clear KPI overview across all ISO 56001 clauses, with maturity levels showing the current state, desired state, gaps, and importance ratings for each capability dimension.

Performance Evaluation

The performance of the IMS shall regularly be evaluated to identify strengths, weaknesses and gaps. This is done through internal audits and management reviews at planned intervals. Based on the evaluation, the system is continually improved by addressing the most critical gaps across all elements (Amplify, 2024).

6. Implementation Plan

Phase 1: Prepare

The preparation phase focuses on building awareness and establishing foundations:

1. Create awareness in your organisation about ISO 56001, what it is, and why it is essential for boosting your innovation performance.
2. Identify senior management representatives for short interviews to establish the innovation ambition, mandate, and intent.
3. Engage an internal innovation management core team to lead the assessment.

Phase 2: Conduct

The conduct phase involves the actual assessment and strategy development:

1. Complete the innovation management assessment using appropriate tools to identify gaps and prioritise critical actions.
2. Determine the first version of the innovation intent, policy, and strategy based on an understanding of the external and internal context of the organization.
3. Develop the implementation plan, including specific actions, responsibilities, and milestones.

Phase 3: Conclude

The conclusion phase translates assessment findings into action:

1. Share, discuss, and validate the implementation plan with key stakeholders to mobilize action.
2. Start delivering on the plan to close the prioritized gaps and establish cadence meetings to monitor and evaluate progress.
3. Conduct an internal audit to verify conformity to ISO 56001 and identify opportunities for improvement of the innovation management system.

Ongoing Activities

Implementation is not a one-time event but a continuous journey:

- Regular assessment cycles to track progress.
- Management reviews and internal audits at defined intervals.
- Continuous refinement of processes based on lessons learned.

7. Conclusion

The opportunities and challenges facing organisations today require that innovation efforts can flourish and deliver the best possible results. ISO 56001 provides an international standard for innovation management systems that specifies the requirements for implementing and continually improving a management system for innovation efforts.

By taking an assessment-led approach aligned with ISO 56004, organisations can systematically identify their current capabilities, define their ambition level, and develop practical implementation plans. The framework presented in this paper combines international experience, standards-led thinking, and practical implementation to ensure innovation is embedded as a core organisational capability.

When innovation activities are managed well, they amplify impact, support sustainable growth, and create environments where teams want to stay. Systematic innovation management is both an option and a responsibility: combining systems expertise, practical implementation, and optional certification enables organisations to move from fragmented activities to a coordinated, organisation-wide approach — realising greater value with fewer resources while building capabilities that are structured, measurable, and sustainable.

References

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Appendix A

Background Information on ISO 56001

What is ISO 56001?

ISO 56001 is the world's first international requirements standard for innovation management systems. It has been developed by ISO, the International Organization for Standardization, with contributions from leading experts from more than 50 countries.

The purpose of an innovation management system is to enhance the ability to realise value under conditions of uncertainty. R&D and I departments can benefit from this broader-based approach, as can the rest of the organization. Realized value can manifest itself as new products, services, processes, models, and other innovations.

The standard provides a generic and adaptable framework that fits any organisation without mandating specific tools or methods. Based on ISO 56001, an organisation can be audited and certified by an independent certification body if the IMS meets the standard's requirements.

The ISO 56000 Family

The following key standards are part of the ISO 56000 family:

- ISO 56000 Innovation management — Fundamentals and vocabulary
- ISO 56001 Innovation management system — Requirements
- ISO 56002 Innovation management system — Guidance
- ISO 56004 Innovation management assessment — Guidance

ISO 56000 specifies the terms, definitions, and principles fundamental to the innovation management discipline and innovation management systems. This is where the common language is defined. ISO 56001 and 56002 both focus on innovation management systems. ISO 56001 is a certifiable standard.

Organizations can choose how to develop their innovation management system in accordance with the standard, so that it fits their unique needs for value realization.

The Clause Structure

ISO 56001 follows the same Harmonized Structure as other management system standards, such as ISO 9001 (quality management) and ISO 14001 (environmental management). This enables organisations to implement innovation management as part of an integrated management system that navigates ambiguity, mitigates risk, and increases the likelihood of innovation success.