

LEE FOSTER

Rethink Performance

A Manifesto for Leaders

Who Want Performance That Lasts

Part 1 - Why Trust Drives Performance

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Who want performance that lasts

Part 1 – Why Trust Drives Performance

By Lee Foster

“Innovation moves at the speed of trust.”

— Julia Spicer OAM

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Introduction

Rethink Performance is the first part of a six-part series exploring how trust shapes the conditions in which performance succeeds or fails.

This opening volume introduces the thinking behind the **InnoWise® framework**. It explains why traditional performance levers, such as strategy, process, and measurement, often struggle to produce sustained results on their own.

Across organisations and communities, capable people frequently find themselves working within systems where knowledge does not flow easily, decisions stall, and momentum fades. This book proposes that these challenges are not simply operational problems but signals of deeper structural conditions.

The series explores those conditions and how leaders can shape them more intentionally. The six parts of the series follow a progression from understanding the problem to applying a practical system for change, outlined as follows:

Part 1 – Why Trust Drives Performance

Explores why trust is a critical structural condition of performance and how it influences knowledge flow, decision-making, and organisational momentum.

Part 2 – The How: The Four Phases of the InnoWise® Framework

Introduces the InnoWise® framework and explains how its four phases — Form, Create, Adopt, and Critique — help teams navigate complexity and bring ideas to life.

Part 3 – InnoWise® in Action

Examines how the framework operates in real organisational contexts, demonstrating how trust, knowledge, and energy shape outcomes in practice.

Part 4 – Measure & Manage Trust, Knowledge, Energy

Presents the practical tools that support the framework, including diagnostic questions, facilitation methods, and approaches for observing trust dynamics within teams.

Part 5 – Scaling and Embedding InnoWise®

Explores how organisations can embed the approach more broadly, building capability so that trust, knowledge, and energy are managed intentionally across projects and systems.

Part 6 – Leading with Trust

Reflects on the leadership shift required to sustain performance in complex environments and how leaders can shape the conditions that allow people and ideas to thrive.

This work is being released progressively by design. Publishing the series in parts allows the ideas to evolve through real-world application and reader feedback as the thinking continues to develop.

The ambition of this series is simple: to help leaders rethink how performance emerges so organisations and communities can build systems capable of delivering better outcomes for the future.

Prologue

Performance is not simply the result of strategy, capability, or effort. It is the outcome of the conditions in which people work. Even though, strategies may be clear, budgets are approved and the teams are capable and committed — initiatives stall, transformations underdeliver and momentum fades.

Across organisations and communities, leaders often search for explanations in the wrong places: for example, they do more planning, reporting, process changes and then apply more pressure. However, performance rarely fails for the reasons we typically measure. Part 1, of this book explores why.

This book is written for people responsible for outcomes — those leading, delivering, or participating in initiatives where performance matters. In many organisations and communities today, traditional performance levers are no longer sufficient. Strategies are clearer, tools are more sophisticated, and data is more abundant than ever. Yet despite these advantages, initiatives struggle to sustain progress. The challenge is not usually a lack of capability. It is a lack of visibility into the conditions that determine whether capability can be translated into performance.

At the system level of *Rethink Performance*, sits the InnoWise® framework. This framework, which is based on many years of academic level research, brings together three interdependent drivers of performance: trust, knowledge, and energy. These forces shape how decisions are made, how information moves, and whether effort compounds into meaningful progress.

At the centre of this framework sits the Trust Engine™. The Trust Engine is the mechanism that determines how effectively knowledge flows, how energy is sustained, and how people respond to uncertainty and pressure. It operates within every team and organisation or community, whether it is acknowledged or not.

When the Trust Engine is healthy, insight moves across boundaries, confidence grows, and effort compounds into performance. When it begins to degrade, familiar symptoms emerge: stalled decisions, defensive behaviour, rework, change fatigue, and rising delivery risk — often long before formal indicators register a problem.

As you read, you may recognise situations where outcomes were shaped less by technical constraints and more by how information moved, how decisions were experienced, or how people responded to uncertainty. These are not isolated issues — they are signals from the ‘Trust Engine’.

The InnoWise® framework, supported by tools such as the Trust Analyser™ and the Knowledge Canvas™, was developed to make these dynamics visible and thus, manageable. The framework draws on applied research, engineering practice, and years of facilitation across both public and private sector environments. Its purpose is not to replace technical or commercial discipline, but to complement it. The framework provides a structured way to observe, discuss, and manage trust, knowledge, and energy across the lifecycle of work — helping leaders understand the conditions in which performance compounds rather than stalls.

To be clear, the InnoWise® framework does not offer certainty. It offers awareness, alignment, and capability. It provides a framework that helps leaders navigate complexity and shape the conditions in which performance can truly last.

This book invites you to slow down just enough to notice those signals. Doing so often allows organisations to move faster where it matters most. Whether you are leading, delivering, advising, or participating in change, this book is intended as a practical companion. A guide that helps establish a shared language, support better conversations, and enable stronger decisions, earlier.

If this work prompts reflection, questions, or even disagreement, that is intentional. Rethinking how we manage performance requires the challenging of assumptions about how results are created.

The ideas explored in this book invite leaders to move beyond traditional performance levers and instead focus on the health of the systems in which people work. When those conditions are understood and shaped deliberately, performance becomes not just achievable, but sustainable.

Part 1 – Why Trust Drives Performance

Trust shapes the conditions that determine whether performance lasts

Performance does not fail for the reasons managers would normally measure. We can tick all the boxes:

- ✓ Strategies are clear
- ✓ Budgets are approved, and
- ✓ Teams are capable

Yet initiatives stall and transformations underdeliver. Projects overrun and momentum fades.

We diagnose the symptoms: scope creep, resistance to change, communication breakdown. However, do we examine the structural conditions beneath them? This book argues that performance is not simply a matter of execution. It is a function of trust:

*Trust determines whether knowledge flows or fragment
Whether energy compounds or dissipates, and
Whether performance lasts — or quietly erodes.*

This first part of the book explores those conditions. It begins by examining the broader performance challenge facing many organisations today. It then explores trust as a structural condition of performance, showing how trust influences the way knowledge flows, decisions are made, and effort is sustained within teams and systems.

From there, the chapters examine two additional system conditions that shape performance:

- Knowledge, which determines whether experience is captured, shared, and built upon rather than lost, and
- Energy, which determines whether effort compounds into momentum or dissipates into fatigue.

Part 1 concludes by examining the shift leaders must make if they are to move beyond managing performance through control alone and instead shape the conditions that allow performance to last.

Chapter 1 – The Performance Challenge

“Another strategy that looked promising on paper but quietly stalled in practice.”

“Another great idea that never quite made it.”

The opportunity to do better is astounding. The statistics demonstrate a large gap in performance. We know that there is no shortage of great ideas, strategy or frameworks to aid managers and team leaders track performance. There is no shortage of performance dashboards nor digital tools promising clarity and control. Yet across industries, performance continues to underdeliver and ideas struggle to come to life.

The numbers are startling, though perhaps, not surprising. Around 95 percent of product innovations fail. Only one percent of digital transformations deliver their promised outcomes (according to the World Economic Forum). And when over one trillion dollars is spent globally each year on digital transformation efforts, it is an incredibly large opportunity to improve. To me and to many, it is a lot of money that could be better spent.



These results are not due to capability problems — they are systemic ones. Even in technically mature sectors — like water, mining, infrastructure — projects stumble for reasons that have little to do with engineering and everything to do with people, governance, and alignment.

Projects or new initiatives often begin with optimism as well as a burst of energy and belief. But for many teams, it becomes exhausting, and:

- Timelines slip
- Decisions slow, and
- Confidence fades.

The idea ends in quiet resignation. The post-mortem usually blames process or poor change management or worse, the finger is pointed at a staff member or collaborator. Based on my research, that I will be unpacking in this book, I found three key factors that lie beneath those labels which I believe is more systemic as well as being a simpler diagnosis:

- Knowledge wasn't shared
- Trust wasn't built, and
- Energy wasn't sustained.

Without these three key ingredients, progress stalls. Yet not many leaders or managers actively manage these constructs. For instance, less than 20% of organisation manage knowledge above an ad hoc level (according to a Deloitte survey). However, those that do prove that it has a significant impact upon outcomes, upon performance.

Trust is not managed for we have limited tools to measure it. As the saying goes:

“If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.”

There are limited tools around to measure trust, like the Net Promoter score. But does it provide sufficient insight so you can manage trust? There is the Trust Pilot, but it is information from only one source, the customer, and about one thing, the product or service. As you will learn, as you read this book, trust emerges in many places and when analysed can help us gain valuable insights.

Energy is measured to some degree, in terms of cost, time, budgets, profits, number of customers or users, employee engagement etc. However, I suggest to you, that what is missing here is a lead indicator of performance. These attributes are either lag indicators or they offer little insight. It is very difficult to change direction once the ship has sailed. And once we realise we need to change direction, how do we determine the correct path? And then, how do we know we are on the right path?

In this Part 1 of 6 ebooks, I will share what I believe is the reason for performance challenges and why we need to rethink how we manage it. I will offer to you, the curious, the manager, the team leader, the board member, a new way of thinking about how to manage for sustainable performance.

When Progress Stalls

As a process engineer working in water treatment across South East Queensland, I saw this pattern repeatedly. Each site had two clear assets that rarely connected:

1. Its heroes: operators who knew the plant like family, and
2. Its documents: drawings, operating procedures, folders of test data.

When experienced operators retired or moved on, knowledge left with them. New engineers sat in offices studying drawings, disconnected from the lived expertise of those who had run the systems for decades. In this regime, organisations repeat experiments. Old problems resurface in new forms and with it, risk increases quietly.

“We’ve tried that before. It didn’t work,” a colleague once told me, and, *“But nobody asked me.”*

Performance stalls not because ideas are poor, but because knowledge fails to flow.

The Cost of Unseen Losses

We often overlook what has been done before because we don’t know who to ask or the knowledge is not documented or not shared. The people involved leave the organisation. And that pattern repeats in every organisation that treats knowledge as background noise rather than an asset: an asset which is the lifeblood of organisational flow, innovation and capability growth.

Think about the hidden cost of lost knowledge: duplicated trials, safety incidents, inconsistent decisions, and the erosion of confidence, or trust, that follows. When knowledge erodes, trust begins to decline. People stop volunteering ideas because *“nothing changes anyway.”* Momentum slows, and leadership assumes the team has run out of creativity when in fact it has simply run out of **energy** (illustrated in Figure 1). Performance metrics confirm decline only after it has compounded. They rarely diagnose erosion while it is still reversible.

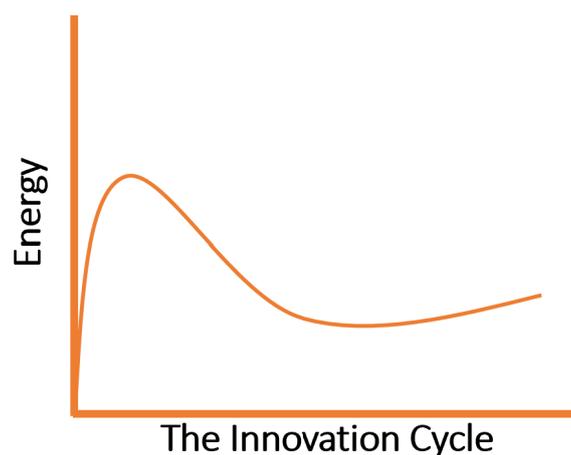


Figure 1 – The Innovation Failure Curve

My Personal Why

As a seasoned engineer, I became curious to find out why it was so hard to get ideas off the ground. One of my passion's is water, [as water is life], and I wanted to be able to put forward the best possible solutions to treat water. However, water providers are, understandably, risk adverse as people's lives are at stake. Do the wrong thing and you can kill someone. It is critical to get water treatment right. Yet, as a good process engineer, I wanted to do better. I wanted to innovate. So why was it so hard to introduce new ways of doing things? That frustration spurred a pivot in my career, to find out:

“Why do good ideas die inside good organisations?”

A key passion for me, and many in our community, is the environment. It is why I became an engineer and why I believe we need to do innovation better. Our planet, our community is facing unprecedented crises including: water scarcity, climate volatility, digital disruption, amongst others. Each issue demands innovation at speed and scale. Yet the faster we go, the more fragile the outcome becomes. The answer, I believe, is not more haste but a more conscious flow of knowledge, trust, and energy.

As Julia Spicer OAM (the form Chief Entrepreneur of Queensland, Australia) famously said,

“Innovation moves at the speed of trust.”

My research uncovered that trust impacts innovation in many ways. It determines whether knowledge will flow or falter. It determines whether we trust that there is sufficient need to drive the impetus for change to occur and be sustained. We understand, that we are creatures of habit and so, change does not come easy. We need a good reason to change.

Furthermore, after two decades in engineering, I found myself curious about the behaviour of organisations and its people. I was curious to understand why do some ideas catch fire with enthusiasm while others limp to the finish line or even fizzle out before the end? I went back to university to undertake research. In my research, I noticed a pattern: successful teams had *alignment*—a shared belief that the problem mattered and that leadership would back them to solve it. They had trust, and because they had trust, they had energy.

My research demonstrated that innovation failure doesn't come from a lack of ideas, but from *systemic human and governance breakdowns*. I found that:

Trust is the grease in the gears that makes innovation work.

Chapter 2- Trust as Performance Infrastructure

Recent global data shows that even when the science is clear, lack of trust in institutions or experts significantly lowers policy support, behavioural change and uptake of new solutions. For instance, only 49% of the public trust business to do what is right to address climate change. Furthermore, in a global study across 68 countries ($\approx 69,000$ respondents), individuals expressed *lower trust in climate scientists than in scientists in general* — and lower trust was associated with less policy support.

For innovation to succeed, and to move at speed and scale, the problem definition needs to be aligned and trusted, the knowledge must be trusted, and the customer or the community must feel that the solution is needed, is feasible and meets their needs. The InnoWise® framework, borne out of my research, addresses all of these aspects. InnoWise® guides the innovation process to be trust centric, to ensure that there will be a *sustained* energy or flow. The ‘Trust Engine’ powers the innovation process.

I began to see innovation as a living system: knowledge is the structure, trust the connective tissue, and energy the means of circulation. When any part weakens, the system falters. Without trust, there is no energy (refer to the illustration in Figure 2), no momentum and no knowledge flow.

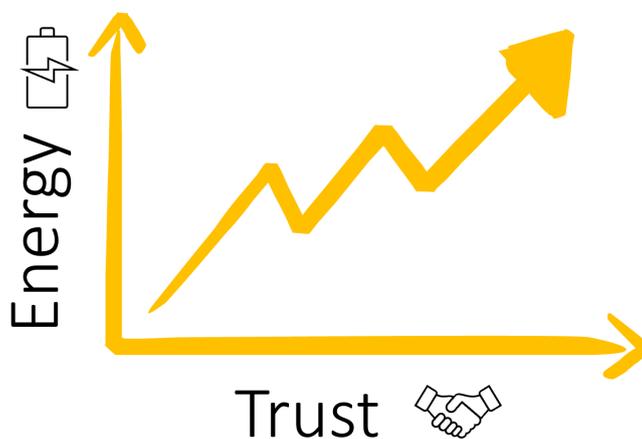


Figure 2: The Trust and Energy Relationship

Field observations across infrastructure, utilities, and digital transformation programs show recurring behavioural and governance breakdowns that limit innovation success. The InnoWise® framework and tools addresses the issues by restoring clarity of purpose, trust, and energy balance. The InnoWise® framework addresses both technical rigour and behavioural fragility.

A Case in Point: Seqwater

During the Millennium Drought, South-East Queensland faced significant water shortages. Seqwater needed water quality data to model its main dam (Wivenhoe dam) to plan the impact of potential new sources (from purified recycled water). The research team proposed installing automated water-quality profilers in Wivenhoe Dam—a novel idea at the time.

Initially the goal was research-focused: gather data to build and calibrate the model to measure the potential impact of recycled water re-entering the dam. Then floods changed the priorities, and the project pivoted toward operational monitoring to improve efficiencies. Over several years, the technology travelled through the innovation cycle many times—idea, trial, setback, revival.

In interviews across research, operations, and management, I heard recurring themes:

- As one senior scientist reflected, the project began with clear goals that no longer aligned as the business and the technology evolved — “*we never revisited the goal.*”
- Participants repeatedly noted that communication, not technology, was the primary barrier: “*it’s just that communication barrier, as you get in most organisations.*”
- *We had trust in the solution for our needs, as a researcher.* However, when the focus changed to operational efficiencies, the efficacy of the technology, the reliability was not sufficient for that purpose.

Those statements weren’t complaints—they were indicators of knowledge and trust misalignment. By mapping them, I began to see patterns that later formed the InnoWise® framework.

Emerging Insights

From that research three truths stood out:

1. **New knowledge is only created through innovation** – and is the fountain of capability and organisational growth; but only when it is consciously governed
2. **Trust creates the energy for change** – but we cannot manage it if we cannot measure it
3. **Energy sustains progress** - without it, even small hurdles feel insurmountable.

Together these formed what I now call the InnoWise® framework and at its heart are the core elements of trust and energy; which forms the ‘Trust Engine’. Without trust, there is no momentum. InnoWise® explains how trust and energy, creates the engine inside every successful innovation.

Trust metrics

As a famous saying goes: “*If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it*”. So, knowing how important trust and metrics are, I decided to explore how to measure it, so that we can manage it.

“*Lee,*” one project manager said to me during the study, “*you keep talking about trust as if it’s a number, but how can you measure it?*” I replied, “*You can measure the language people use when they talk about their work, and you can see whether that language builds or drains energy.*” He paused, “*So, if we could track trust, we’d know when a project’s in trouble before the KPIs show it?*” “*Exactly, trust metrics are a lead indicator and they make a great KPI.*”

That dialogue captures what InnoWise® and its tools sets out to do: provide lead indicators for innovation health before costly lag indicators appear.

Chapter 3 – Knowledge as System Memory

How structure, trust, and energy transform knowledge into innovation.

It was during a debrief at Seqwater when the missing link finally clicked for me. We were standing around a whiteboard after another round of ‘*lessons learned*’. Everyone agreed there were lessons to be learned, but why do the same frustrations keep surfacing?

- “*We wrote everything down,*” someone said, “*but no one used it.*”
- “*We ran training,*” another added, “*but by the time the next project started, the team had changed.*”
- “*Does anyone actually look at the lessons learned database?*”

Those words, “*lessons learned*”, stuck with me. Knowledge wasn’t being lost because people didn’t care; it was because there was no system of governance to hold it in place, to embed the new knowledge into practical, tangible outcomes. We managed projects, we managed risk, but we didn’t manage *knowledge itself*. For knowledge, far too often, is not viewed as a core asset. When it is, however, organisations are more likely to thrive.

From Management to Governance

Most organisations limit **Knowledge Management (KM)** to focus on information: databases, reports, and document control systems. It answers the question, “*Where can I find it?*” But knowledge lives in motion and in different forms: tacit and explicit. It can be simple and it can be complex. For knowledge to be dynamic, it needs something more active that addresses the rules, habits, and expectations that keep learning alive while decisions are being made.

That's Knowledge Governance (KG): the intentional coordination of how knowledge is created, shared, and applied to achieve strategic outcomes. Governance is to knowledge what project controls are to budgets. KG ensures that the intellectual and experiential capital created in one project becomes the foundation for the next. Without it, organisations drift; decisions repeat; people rebuild what others have already built. With it, organisations grow; they find new opportunities for that new knowledge; they treat knowledge as an asset.

Project-based organisations

Project-based organisations (PBOs) like utilities, councils, or engineering consultancies live in constant motion. Each project ends, teams disband, and the next challenge begins. This structure rewards delivery but punishes reflection and capability growth. Knowledge leaks through the cracks, and every new team rebuilds what another has already learned.

Knowledge decays through the project lifecycle when it isn't captured, transferred, or governed. My thesis findings showed that:

- *“Project-based organisations are at continual risk of knowledge loss through handover, restructure, and change in leadership, unless deliberate governance mechanisms exist.”*
- *“Project discontinuity, personnel changes, and weak feedback loops contribute to loss of critical knowledge and reduced organisational learning.”*

Without structured KG, PBOs experience rapid knowledge decay as key staff rotate and lessons remain uncaptured. To break that cycle we need knowledge governance, not just management. Governance means intentional rules, behaviours, and rhythms that ensure knowledge created in one project becomes capability for the next.

There is a human aspect to KG that requires attention for innovation to be successful as knowledge doesn't move by itself; people move it. It's the people who decide how much of themselves to invest in the project, based upon how much they *trust* the environment around them. During one focus group, a field technician described why he sometimes withheld ideas:

“It's not that I don't want to speak up,” he said. “It's that I'm not sure what'll happen if I do. Sometimes you get thanked; sometimes you get told to stay in your lane.”

That comment summarised the social contract of innovation. When trust is high, sharing ideas, thoughts or concerns, feels safe. When it's low, silence becomes the norm; and silence, as one operator later told me, *“...kills energy faster than failure does.”* These examples demonstrate the importance of managing and measuring trust signals and then having

appropriate trust-based actions like: making small actions that give due credit, share the risk, share vulnerability; builds psychological safety and thus, trust.

The Framework Takes Shape

We live in an age obsessed with frameworks—Design Thinking, Agile, Lean Startup, not to mention the many project management methods like PMBOK etc. Each framework or method offers valuable tools, but none directly address the human currency of innovation: trust. Nor do they address the key asset of innovation, knowledge. You can have the best sprint boards and prototypes in the world, but if your team doesn't trust the process or each other, nothing moves. If you don't manage knowledge consciously, then key elements will slip which erodes trust or impacts efficiency (and the energy for the project).

That realisation shaped what would become the **InnoWise®** framework: a system not to replace existing methods but to augment them, *energise* them, through KG and behavioural insight. Since the creation of the framework was formed from sound scientific methods, my approach was to unpack what is already known, to find the gaps. Thus, the framework integrates very easily into existing systems by augmenting these systems with a method that addresses these key gaps of knowledge and trust.

My research took me into examining how knowledge and innovation processes work. I found there was a sequence for each that could be aligned (for the first time). When I mapped these insights across dozens of interviews and documents, a pattern emerged: four repeating phases that every innovation cycled through:

1. **Form** – The initiation stage where we understand *why* change is needed *and* where new knowledge and new collaborations start to form
2. **Create** – Building and testing the solution *and* the knowledge artefacts
3. **Adopt** – Transferring and embedding the new knowledge *and* the solution into practice
4. **Critique** – Reflecting, learning, and identifying new opportunities for the new knowledge in the next cycle (or elsewhere).

These four steps became the unique phases of the InnoWise® framework. The framework integrates trust, knowledge, and energy into a continuous governance cycle (illustrated in Figure 3). The unique aspect of this framework is the focus upon knowledge and trust at each step.

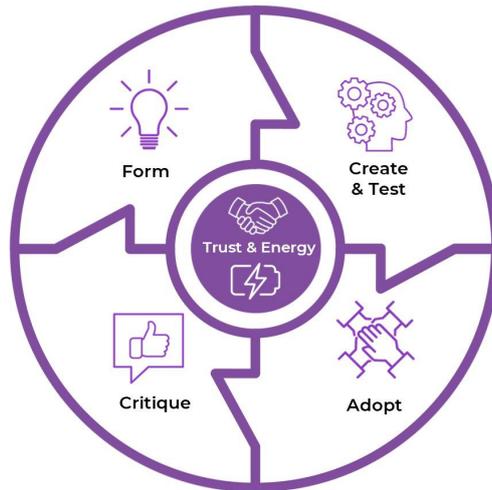


Figure 3 – the InnoWise® Knowledge Governance Cycle

The knowledge goal is initiated in ‘Form’, codified in ‘Create’, transferred and embedded during ‘Adopt’, and reviewed in ‘Critique’. The Critique step closes that round of improvement, identifies opportunities for the new knowledge and directs the *formation* of the next round of innovation.

Trust and energy start off on a high on a new project. Everyone is excited, enthusiastic, willing to participate. The team starts to form. Collaborators are identified. Resources are allocated. Then trust is tested during the create phase as knowledge is shared, solutions are tested, problems emerge which drains energy. Then the solution is ready to be rolled out to a wider audience, the actual customer. The excitement (the energy) builds. The knowledge to use and maintain the solution is embedded. Feedback is provided. Benefits are realised. New knowledge and new problems are identified. A new form phase begins.

The Knowledge Canvas™ is the tool I have developed to help innovators, managers, leaders, navigate the InnoWise® process. The Knowledge Canvas template is shown in Figure 4. The InnoWise platform provides access to the canvas and steps you through each section, until a complete knowledge map is created.

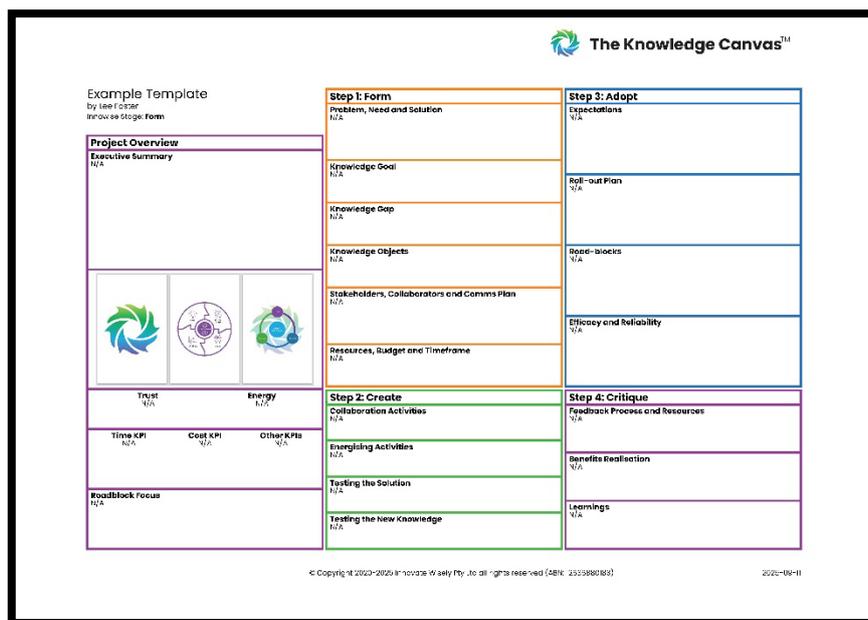


Figure 4 – The Knowledge Canvas™ template

Innovators are encouraged to complete each section at the beginning of a project to ensure the project is planned with knowledge and trust in mind. However, the canvas can be completed at any stage. It creates a great platform to share what is going to be or has been created.

Chapter 4- The ‘Trust Engine™’

At the heart of the InnoWise® process is the ‘Trust Engine™’, where trust drives the energy needed for a continuous flow. Trust is at the heart, for it interacts with every stage of the process: from Form to Critique. With trust at the heart, knowledge, trust, and energy interact dynamically to create successful, innovative outcomes. Furthermore, if trust is key for flow, then **energy** determines the flow rate. Energy is that collective, silent variable that you can feel in a room when people believe something is possible. You can see it in the pace of meetings, the tone of emails, the willingness to stay five minutes longer to solve a problem. It is the level of resources being assigned. Conversely, when energy drops, projects fall into “*compliance mode*”. Tasks (may) get ticked off, but the pace slows and curiosity vanishes.

“*But where do you see trust emerge in the innovation process?*”, I am often asked. During my research I analysed many interviews, reports, and made observations of how Seqwater and other organisations operated. The research identified six key mechanisms that separated

successful innovation from the rest as they all had distinct impacts on trust (illustrated in Figure 5):

1. **Leadership** visibility – leaders model excitement, curiosity and vulnerability
2. **People** or collaborative strength – the need for cross-functional relationships is understood, valued and maintained
3. **Knowledge** flows – everyone knows *why* we're innovating and there is a specific, clear, knowledge-based goal and plan to meet the customer needs, support solution integrity and organisation growth
4. **Problem** alignment – The problem definition is understood with a focus on why
5. **Solution** integrity – The solution meets the needs of the customer
6. **Tools & Resources** – The team is well supported for the entire project, from initiation through to benefits realisation and beyond with a focus on learning, trust and energy

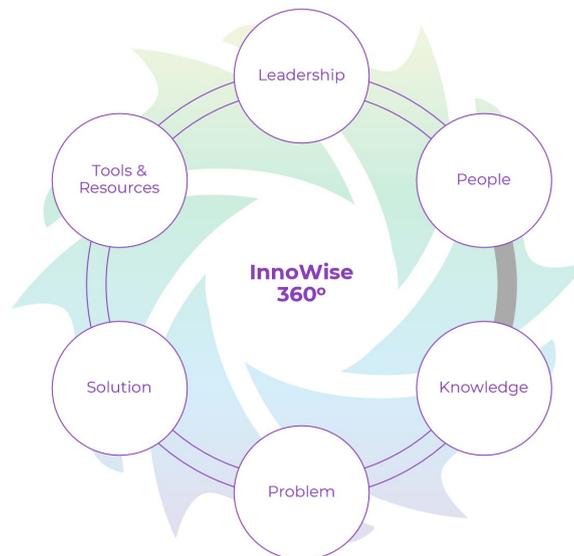


Figure 5 – The InnoWise® key mechanisms

My hypothesis and observations suggest that, where these mechanisms operate with trust, innovation flourishes. Where they were absent, energy depletes and along with it, the project stalls and trust fractures. For instance, having feedback loops that focus's upon finding new opportunities for the new knowledge, rather than finger pointing, is always going to have better outcomes. This mechanism will also support the integration of that new knowledge into the organisation and consequently, the organisation capability grows.

While it is great to understand that these variables (trust and energy) are key to success, I soon realised, that without a means of measuring trust and energy, there would be limited ability to manage them. So, I went about developing a means to do just that.

Trust and Energy Are Measurable

I often get asked, “*How can you measure trust?*” My premise is that you can measure the *effects* of trust and energy and you can interpret a score from clever, thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis examines the words provided and those spoken (with permission) to identify common themes. We can also interpret the level of energy, not just from the words, but by the level of resources being allocated, by the number of times a document is downloaded, or the level of communication going on for a project or product.

The **Trust Analyser™** is the tool I have developed to measure ‘Trust and Energy’. How the analyser works will be further explained in the insight call and within the full edition of the book.

Applying the Lens Elsewhere

After Seqwater, I began testing the model with other organisations. The InnoWise® tools were applied in several very different contexts including: manufacturing, a chemical engineering technology rollout for a mining client and a regional water strategy (to name just a few). The testing revealed consistent behavioural patterns beneath the technical work that aligned with the framework.

The tools were refined and the learnings helped create the governance checklist. The feedback we received kept giving us energy that we were on the right path. What we did and what we said, and more importantly, what our clients said, demonstrated that the InnoWise® framework made sense.

Because creating sustainable performance where innovation flourishes is about management of knowledge, trust, and energy in equal measure.

“Performance fails when it forgets its people. It succeeds when knowledge, trust, and energy move together.”

Chapter 5 – Energy as Adaptive Capacity

When we innovate wisely, every meeting, every dataset, every lesson becomes an investment in collective intelligence. Innovation stops being an act of heroism and becomes an act of stewardship. We learn, we trust, we energise and in doing so, we make progress sustainable.

Because the real engine of change is not technology: it's trust.

When Trust Transforms Energy

The day trust turned the project around.

In every project, there's a day when something shifts, when the conversation deepens, the tension eases, and progress feels possible again. Often, that shift is not about new data or a clearer Gantt chart. It's about trust.

"We stopped defending our positions and started defending the outcome."

That was the day a major utilities team finally broke through a stalemate over direction and setting goals. The technology hadn't changed; the people and the need had. Once the team acknowledged what they didn't know, and trusted each other enough to admit it, knowledge began to move again: and with it, energy.

The following vignettes illustrate how trust, knowledge, and energy interact across real projects measured through the Trust Analyser™.

Vignette 1 – The Council Room

In a regional council meeting, tension filled the air at one point when the Manager was unsure about trust levels. Operators, Managers and Executives sat across from each other, facing compliance and resourcing challenges. The tension broke when the Mayor said,

"We trust you absolutely. We have every faith in what you are doing. We are here to support you 100%."

A key engineer on the team said, *"This is our chance to make change, so it can't be another report that sits on a shelf."*

At the operator workshop, one operator said quietly, *"I want to be able to go home at night with confidence that the water will remain safe."*

Instead of pushing harder, the project lead re-framed the discussion around "why this matters" to gain community confidence. That was the day trust turned the project around.

Transparency restores trust when feedback becomes visible.

Vignette 2 – The Digital Divide

A software team piloting a new analytics tool found adoption stalling. They were not sure on the best approach to engage the client for trials, to transfer their knowledge and test the solution. Despite tight deadlines and difficulty gaining a focus on the project (from the client), the atmosphere was collaborative. The Trust Analyser™ data showed high engagement but flagged "limited formal feedback mechanisms." The outcome was a strategy to adopt the Knowledge Canvas™ as a communication tool and the Trust Analyser™ as a feedback tool and as a measure of progress.

A systematic approach aids progress.

Vignette 3 – The Ebb and Flow of SAM

As the water quality profiler technology evolved at Seqwater, so did its purpose. However, not having a clear understanding of purpose directly affected the energy. A senior scientist recalled the moment energy ebbed: “*the energy drop[ped] off significantly, when the need... faded away or dropped off the agenda.*” The technology had not become less clever, its purpose had become less clear. “*When the need faded, so did momentum.*”

Revisiting the need, the purpose, on a regular basis is critical.

Beyond the Projects

These moments are not isolated. They’re signals of something universal: that trust is not a “soft” measure, it’s a system dynamic. When trust shifts, everything moves. Knowledge flows more freely, energy replenishes, and people begin to create wisely instead of reactively.

That’s what it means to innovate wisely. It is to know that progress depends as much on relationships as on results, and that insight without trust rarely leaves the page to form action.

Epilogue

About Innovate Wisely™

Innovate Wisely™ for a Better Tomorrow

Innovation doesn't begin with technology; it begins with trust. Whether you're leading a community project, designing a digital platform, or reshaping a business system, the InnoWise® approach will help you navigate complexity with confidence and humanity. It puts the people ahead of the project.

Innovate Wisely™ is a business innovation consultancy that helps organisations deliver superior performance by strengthening the human systems behind innovation. At the heart of Innovate Wisely™ is the InnoWise® framework. The framework is a structured, people-centred cycle of four steps underpinned by measurable knowledge, trust, and energy: Form → Create → Adopt → Critique.

Our digital tools: the Knowledge Canvas™, Trust Analyser™, and InnoWise® process checklist; transform invisible dynamics into data that leaders can manage with confidence. Our services (which include facilitation and training) help build capability to utilise the tools in house or with your clients.

We partner with organisations across utilities, mining, government, and industry to:

- Build trust-aware, high-performing teams
- Govern knowledge as a renewable asset, and
- Deliver projects that achieve both technical and human outcomes.

The steps involved could include:

- Start with a conversation
- Run an InnoWise® process checklist
- Run a Trust Analyser™ pulse
- Map your first Knowledge Canvas™, and
- Discover how quickly energy flows when people believe in the journey.

Our purpose is simple:

to help you innovate wisely, for a better tomorrow.

The InnoWise® Sustaining Successful Performance Workshops

The InnoWise® workshops are designed to create practical pathways to drive toward a sustained level of successful performance. Innovation succeeds when people have the structure, tools, and insight to work wisely together. Our workshops help teams build those capabilities through three progressive streams that each address a different layer of performance: teams, capability and outcomes.

1. Sustaining Team Alignment – Building Trust Awareness

“Innovation moves at the speed of trust.”

This interactive session helps teams recognise and measure the trust dynamics that influence collaboration and delivery. Using live Trust Analyser™ diagnostics, participants explore the behavioural drivers of alignment, confidence, and energy. Outcomes include:

- Understand how trust forms, fractures, and renews
- Learn to interpret trust and energy data, and
- Build communication habits that sustain momentum.

Ideal for: intact project teams, leadership groups, and governance boards.

2. Sustaining Growth – Learn the How

“Knowledge is the structure of innovation.”

A hands-on learning experience introducing the InnoWise® toolkit: the Knowledge Canvas™, Trust Analyser™, Rubrics, and Governance Checklist. Participants apply each tool to their own initiatives, gaining both technical skill and cultural awareness. Outcomes include:

- Learn to design and facilitate the InnoWise® cycle
- Integrate trust and energy metrics into existing frameworks
- Establish internal champions for knowledge governance.

Ideal for: innovation managers, PMO leads, HR/L&D specialists, and transformation practitioners.

3. Sustaining Performance – Project-Focused Outcomes

“Learning becomes capability when it’s applied.”

A project-based coaching program where your team uses the InnoWise® framework on a live initiative. Together, we track trust, knowledge, and energy across the Form–Create–Adopt–Critique cycle to demonstrate measurable improvement. Outcomes include:

- Clear knowledge goals and KPIs
- Improved trust and energy profiles over the project life
- Documented learnings and capability uplift for future cycles.

Ideal for organisations seeking to embed knowledge management, trust metrics and, or innovation discipline within their delivery programs.

Enquiries

To explore which workshop or approach best suits your needs, visit www.innovatewisely.com or contact info@innovatewisely.com. Custom programs and executive briefings are available on request.

From Insight to Application

Start small.

Measure what matters.

Build trust that endures.

***Innovate Wisely™** — where knowledge builds capability, trust fuels momentum, and energy sustains progress.*

Let's Build a Better Tomorrow Together

This Part 1 of the book has explained why innovation outcomes are rarely limited by ideas or technology and why trust, knowledge, and energy are the real determinants of progress. The Trust Analyser™ was developed to make these dynamics visible in teams and projects, before traditional performance metrics reveal trouble. It makes the invisible, visible.

If Part 1 of this book resonates, please find some time for a complimentary Alignment call. In that time, we will explore:

- How these patterns may be showing up in your context
- Where trust may be enabling or constraining outcomes
- Whether a Trust Analyser™ report would provide useful decision support.

No preparation is required.

The purpose of the conversation is insight, not obligation.

(End of eBook, Part 1 of Rethink Performance: Trust as the Foundation of Performance)

About the Author

Lee Foster is a water engineer, innovation strategist, and founder of Innovate Wisely™ — a consultancy and platform dedicated to helping organisations turn knowledge into capability, trust into energy, and ideas into measurable outcomes.

With over thirty years' experience in the water industry, Lee has led major infrastructure and transformation projects across Australia, combining technical depth with a passion for people-centred innovation.

Her research at Queensland University of Technology explored how trust, knowledge, and energy interact to determine project success — work that became the foundation for the InnoWise® Framework, the Knowledge Canvas™, and the AI-powered Trust Analyser™.

Lee continues to collaborate with utilities, councils, and technology partners to embed innovation cultures that last — reminding leaders everywhere that:

“The future isn't built on more ideas, but on deeper trust.”

