

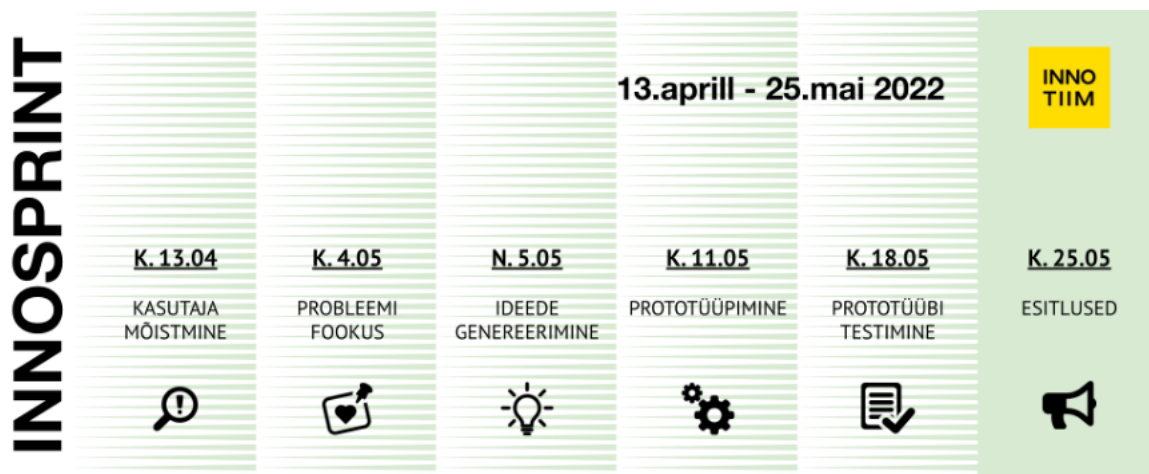
## Public sector innovation sprint and sherpa training

How to bring **new ways of working** and **problem-solving tools** to the **Estonian public sector**? How to make people understand that there are **alternatives to the usual exhausting meeting format** that empowers few? How can we snap civil servants out of their daily grind and soak them briefly in the waters of design thinking so that they might emerge, if not quite reborn, at least with a vision of what could be? Once the experience is created – how to find guides for dozens of teams several times a year without it requiring an endlessly expanding budget?

### Innosprint

The public sector innovation team, or Innotiim, is constantly looking for ways to spread design thinking, agile development, and a culture of experimentation among civil servants. Google Design Sprint and other similar methods are widespread tools in the private sector, but they have not gained wide popularity in the Estonian public sector. Over the course of a year and a half, Innotiim has developed an innovation sprint format suitable for the Estonian public sector – Innosprint. By constantly adapting and improving the format, Innotiim has seen that it is a highly effective tool for spreading design thinking methods and generating enthusiasm around them.

An Innosprint takes place on five days spread over six weeks. What makes an Innosprint different from a traditional sprint is that there is time left between days 1 and 2 for all participants to conduct their own user research: interviews and, if possible, other kinds of field work. Innotiim sees this as an important step that changes the civil servants' thinking and helps them understand the problem from the point of view of the user.



#### INNOSPRINT 13 April – 25 May 2022

Wed, 13/04 – understanding the user  
Wed, 04/05 – focus of the problem  
Thu, 05/05 – ideation

Wed, 11/05 – prototyping  
Wed, 18/05 – testing the prototype  
Wed, 25/05 – presentations

To date, four Innosprints have taken place, where altogether 381 people from 85 organisations have sought novel solutions in 53 project teams. It is important to emphasise that **the vast majority of participants have never encountered design thinking before**. The teams consist mostly of civil servants, but not only. The participant feedback has been that **the sprint format is attractive, well-structured, and –defined, meaning that it is easy to include participants from the private and third sector as well**. Innosprints are centrally managed by Innotiim and fully virtual (via Zoom and Miro), which does not prevent teams from having a physical war room and also allows people to take part in the sprint from all over Estonia.

Based on feedback from participants, the value of Innosprints is multifaceted:

- **Effective teamwork experience** – the sprint allows you to quickly progress even with complex topics. *‘During the sprint, the focus was on the problem that needed to be solved, and we did not get distracted’. ‘I gained experience on how to solve complex things with simple means’. ‘The Innosprint days provided an opportunity to really deal with the topic in depth.’ ‘The best time management experience I have had.’*
- **A common understanding of the problem** – thanks to field work and the involvement of users both in first discussing the problem as well as later in quickly testing solutions, all participants have a common understanding of the problem and the bottlenecks of the solution: *‘Field work is absolutely necessary and gives a good insight into real life.’*
- The sprint helps put together a **core development team** to implement new solutions: *‘We found a solution that I believe has great potential. We established the core of the team, with whom we can further develop this solution.’*
- **Systematic methodology, clearer focus, and various ideas** for the future: *‘We found a specific solution to our problem, which we will start implementing immediately. Our sprint Miro board also contains many other ideas that we will definitely take on.’*
- The sprint helps to formulate **well-thought-out specifications** for procuring further developments.

One of the most important observations has been that the project teams can manage within the given time and activity framework even without a mentor proficient in service design. However, this means that they ask less critical questions and their solutions tend to be on the safe side. This observation gave rise to the idea to train facilitators, or sherpas, in parallel with the Innosprint in the spring of 2022.

## Sherpa sprint

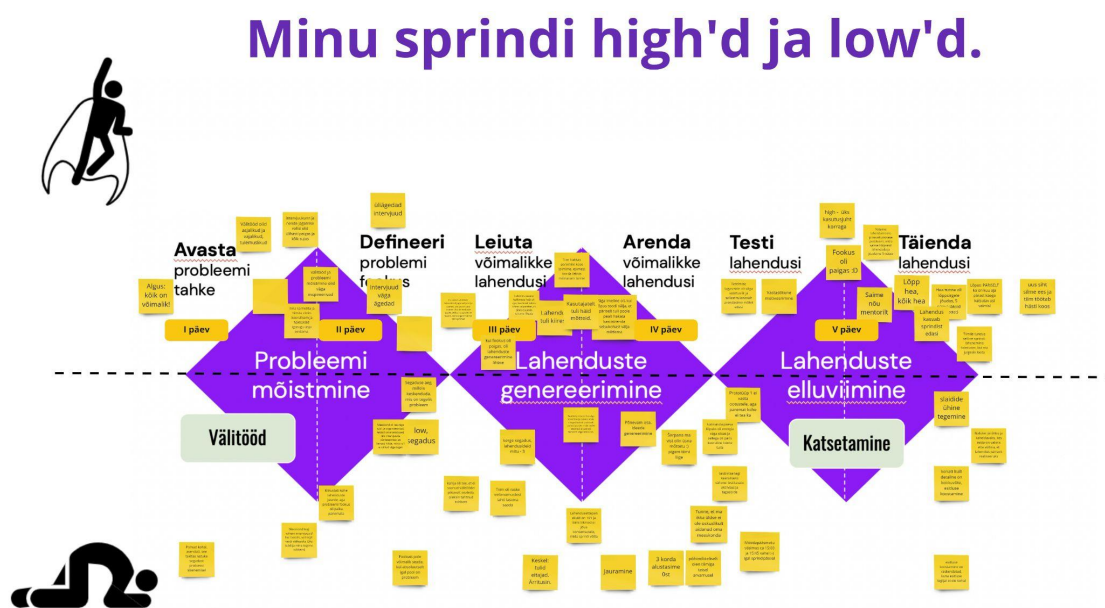
The sherpa sprint is a unique **training programme in Estonia that increases the capacity of facilitation in the public sector and finds people who are inspired by the values of service design and enchanted by the possibilities of co-creation**. In the spring of 2022, Innotiim developed and carried out a **training programme** in parallel with the Innosprint, **where, based on their previous experience and knowledge of working with civil servants, Innotiim provided 22 public sector employees with basic knowledge of managing a**

**co-creative design process.** In parallel with the training, each of them led a sprint team – half of them led their own team while the other half led a team of strangers from an unknown field. The participants considered the second option to be a more useful learning experience and said that they would like to do it again in the future for the purpose of further development.

When preparing the training, we focused on the **methods of effective learning**:

- **We let the participants make sense** of new topics on their own and offer their own solutions;
- We presented them with **challenging tasks** – most sherpas had no previous experience with design thinking and its methods;
- **We reduced stress and the fear of failure**: every sherpa had a mentor from Innotiim who could be called in to help at any time;
- We gave them **the opportunity to immediately apply what they had learned**;
- You learn by making mistakes but only if the mistakes are analysed – **at the end of each sprint day, the sherpas analysed if they'd fulfilled the goals they'd set for the day** and reflected in a small group together with a mentor on moments or situations where something could have been done differently;
- **Transfer of skills** – after each sprint day, the sherpa analysed how and for what they could use the same worksheets or discussion formats in their work.

Creating psychological safety was important for the sherpas: they became aware of their own influence on team dynamics throughout the process. They dared to ask much more (even naive and seemingly inappropriate) questions and perceived their responsibility to broaden the topic and keep the discussions in focus. The tricks provided by Innotiim during the briefing on the morning of each sprint day helped the sherpas to cope with setbacks, *'It went exactly how you said it would!'*



*An example of a worksheet with which the sherpas had to reflect on the work done.*

**The feedback on the sherpa sprint was overwhelmingly positive: ‘inspiring, engaging, fun, well thought out, practical, etc.’** It turned out that Innotiim managed to create a supportive and safe learning format that encouraged people with no previous experience to test themselves and discover their strengths, weaknesses, and, in some cases, hidden talents. **With their newfound confidence, several sherpas have adopted tools from the sprint into their daily work, for example Miro worksheets and meeting management techniques.** One sherpa has already organised innovation sprints for their organisation and several more are planning to do so.

*‘I have already used [the knowledge gained from the sherpa sprint] – for example, I am now developing the prototype in-house and trying to use the knowledge gained for this purpose and put small teams to work.’*

*I plan to use the Miro worksheets used in the sprint in my work, as they are very compact and specific tools. In addition, I will use the social skills I have learned in coaching other teams and solving problems.’*

Many participants of sprint project teams have expressed their wish to take part in the next Innosprint in the role of a sherpa. This means that **through sherpa sprints, Innotiim can develop a network of facilitators whose capabilities grow year by year.**

It is not always necessary or possible to involve a service designer for every service improvement. **After the sherpa training, there are now 22 people working in the public sector who are familiar with the process of design thinking. They know the tools that help include user perspective on problems, they know how to apply better discussion management and co-creation methods in their daily work, and they can initiate user-centred development processes.**

*‘I have already recommended the sherpa sprint to several colleagues. It is a wonderful experience to learn intensively through practice. I also really liked the structure of the whole programme: it was very professionally done by Innotiim. Each sherpa having their own mentor and analysing the day with the mentor at the end of each day was very useful.’*

*‘I would recommend [the sherpa sprint] to everyone. It is a methodology that has a place in both the public and private sectors, both in thinking small about big issues and thinking big about small issues.’*

The final presentations of Innosprint spring of 2022 can be found [here](#).