ADVANCEMENT

3LABS = INNOVATION

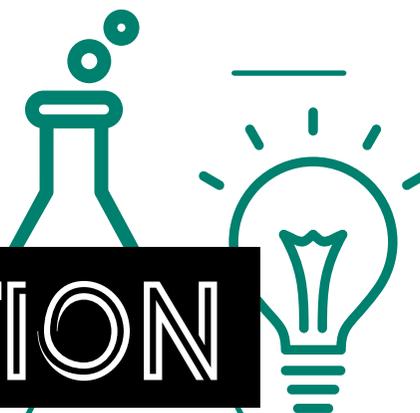Every time 3Labs is held, an effort is made to transform the space into a hub of excitement and limitless possibilities.

3 **Labs has begun! With that announcement, the monthly innovation whirlwind kicks off at 3 Sweden.**

3Labs, also known as **3** Sweden's company-wide innovative event, allows participants to take a day from work to collaborate with anyone they want and work on anything they want, however they want.

The rules are simple enough: their projects must be related to the business operations of **3** Sweden, and the teams must share their results the next day. Sonia Ling, IT Project Manager and member of the team known as the 3Labs Crew, says, "The whole idea is to try out something you believe is good, work on it for one day, and receive feedback on its merits. The key is, you challenge yourself, you share your results, and everyone's a winner."

The day after the innovative event, a 'marketplace' is set up in a conference room, where each 3Labs team demonstrates their innovative solutions. Visitors are given three Lego blocks each as they enter, which they use to vote for their favourite demonstration. After the visitors cast their votes, the team with the highest stack of Lego blocks wins. Not only does the team keep the trophy until the next event, but their idea also has a chance of being implemented in the daily

operations of the company and to have a hugely positive impact.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

3Labs started off with the IT department contemplating how they could achieve **3** Sweden's vision – "Mobil kommunikation på kundens villkor" which translates as "Mobile communication on the customer's terms".

"We knew what we wanted to achieve and whom it would involve, but the 'how' was a work in progress. Someone within the IT department mentioned 'hackathons' (events where computer programmers collaborate on software projects over a very short time), where staff would be given the time and space to work on ideas they are passionate about. After management agreed to give it a go – with some ground rules – we pulled out the parts of the process that would apply to the company, and created 3Labs," says Ms Ling.

"We want to be Sweden's best IT department and that requires room for new ideas and innovation. It's about smart, small changes, new technologies, or completely different ways of doing things," says Ms Ling. 3Labs provides the environment and the people make it happen.

"It began as an initiative to boost innovation within the IT department," she continues. Today it is a cross-department

3Labs welcomes staff from across the company to work either as individuals, or together in large groups, to collaborate and innovate.

Product lead times cut from six months to two weeks.

event where people from IT, Network, Product, Operations, Marketing, Customer Service and Digital Channels come to collaborate. "We didn't anticipate this becoming a company-wide event. But that is exactly what it is today. 3Labs has become an event for anyone at **3** Sweden."

SERIOUS BUSINESS
Over the past two-and-a-half years, 3Labs has generated over 140 innovations. These ideas vary from trying out a new tool, system or platform, to delivering new apps, test-automation suites and operations management. Some have been implemented to help make the operations of **3** Sweden much more efficient and productive. One example is 3Agile Architecture Visualisation, a web-based tool for visualising the company's systems integrations and architecture in a more interactive way.

Other good prospects are in the pipeline and will undergo planning and other preparatory work. A potential mobile app that has come out of 3Labs will ideally tell customers the state of their mobile device's Internet service, including performance features such as speed and reception.

But what if some of the ideas coming out are failures? Ms Ling replies, "There are no failures with 3Labs. Only challenges. Everyone's a winner, and by working with ideas, we disrupt and cause paradigm shifts in the pattern of our thinking, allowing us to be more creative. Just being a part of 3Labs is a success."

BRIGHT FUTURE
The success of the programme is due to its dedicated 3Labs Crew, the backing from the management team and all the staff who have taken part in the event. "Together, we have built the spirit of 3Labs," says Ms Ling.

The hard part comes next. "Our work in embedding the spirit deeper into **3** Sweden's culture has just begun," says Ms Ling. "But the 3Labs Crew is up to the challenge and we see a future where the numbers of both the participants and the Crew will continue to grow."

3Labs has pushed, and continues to push, **3** Sweden. Lots of ideas have come out of it. More importantly, its spirit – experimentation and innovation – has become part of **3** Sweden's future. □

GETTING GRAPHIC: 3AGILE ARCHITECTURE VISUALISATION
Out of the innovative kitchen of 3Labs came a game-changing application – 3Agile Architecture Visualisation has changed and improved the company's way of working.

AND SO IT WAS BORN
3 Sweden's IT department designs software to facilitate the company's business workflow, and these software systems depend on smooth interactions with one another to function. As these intertwined systems continued to grow, it became increasingly difficult to track how they were connected to one another, and in which part of the business chain they were involved.

3Labs was the perfect place to find a solution.

The idea was simple: Visualise the ecology of the systems in the form of a graph so that a user can see how all these systems are connected to one another.

PICTURE-PERFECT
The 3Agile Architecture Visualisation tool does just that. The tool provides a graphical view of which systems are involved in the business flow and in which subset of the integration each system is used.

VERSATILE
Born out of 3Labs, the application has dramatically improved productivity, helping **3** Sweden to work faster, and smarter.

The tool allows business analysts, architects, developers, testers and operations support to efficiently visualise – and subsequently identify – business requirements to fulfil and problems to solve.

In the past three years, **3** Sweden has consistently cut down the time needed to deliver new products. The team reduced its lead time for new product release from six months to two months, and is now on the verge of cutting the delivery time further to an amazing two weeks. An impressive feat, in which 3Labs has definitely played its part.