

Fidelity to Context

A Realist Perspective on Implementation Science

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Fidelity to context

1. Context matters in evaluation
2. We need a more sophisticated conception of context
3. Making the case for theory-driven evaluation



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**If we want to understand why
there is variability across
implementation outcomes**

And we need a methodology equipped to
make valid, reliable, and useful causal
inferences on how knowledge gets translated
in situ

Cited over
10,000 times on
Google Scholar

The Consolidated Framework for Implementation Science Research (CFIR)

Based on 500 published sources
across 13 scientific disciplines

RESEARCH

Open Access



The updated Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research based on user feedback

Laura J. Damschroder, Caitlin M. Reardon*, Marilla A. Opra Widerquist and Julie Lowery

Abstract

Background: Many implementation efforts fail, even with highly developed plans for execution, because contextual factors can be powerful forces working against implementation in the real world. The Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) is one of the most commonly used determinant frameworks to assess these contextual factors; however, it has been over 10 years since publication and there is a need for updates. The purpose of this project was to elicit feedback from experienced CFIR users to inform updates to the framework.

Methods: User feedback was obtained from two sources: (1) a literature review with a systematic search; and (2) a survey of authors who used the CFIR in a published study. Data were combined across both sources and reviewed to identify themes; a consensus approach was used to finalize all CFIR updates. The VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System IRB declared this study exempt from the requirements of 38 CFR 16 based on category 2.

Results: The systematic search yielded 376 articles that contained the CFIR in the title and/or abstract and 334 unique authors with contact information; 59 articles included feedback on the CFIR. Forty percent ($n = 134/334$) of authors completed the survey. The CFIR received positive ratings on most framework sensibility items (e.g., applicability, usability), but respondents also provided recommendations for changes. Overall, updates to the CFIR include revisions to existing domains and constructs as well as the addition, removal, or relocation of constructs. These changes address important critiques of the CFIR, including better centering innovation recipients and adding determinants to equity in implementation.

Conclusion: The updates in the CFIR reflect feedback from a growing community of CFIR users. Although there are many updates, constructs can be mapped back to the original CFIR to ensure longitudinal consistency. We encourage users to continue critiquing the CFIR, facilitating the evolution of the framework as implementation science advances.

Keywords: Implementation science, Implementation framework, Implementation determinants, Implementation outcomes, Implementation evaluation, Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research, CFIR, Theory

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Research Aims

Question 1

How is context currently understood within implementation science?

Question 2

Why do current conceptions of context fall short of offering explanatory insight?

Question 3

How might realist methodology help us develop a more causally active conception of context?

How is context understood within
implementation science?

“

Context is the **set of circumstances or unique factors** that **surround a particular implementation effort.**

Nilsen and Bernhardsson 2019, p. 18.

Nilsen, Per, and Susanne Bernhardsson. 2019. 'Context Matters in Implementation Science: A Scoping Review of Determinant Frameworks That Describe Contextual Determinants for Implementation Outcomes'. *BMC Health Services Research* 19 (1): 189.

Laws and
regulations

The global economy





“

Implementation, by its very nature, is a social process that is intertwined with the context in which it takes place. Context consists of a constellation of active interacting variables and is not just a backdrop for implementation.

Damschroder et al. 2019, p. 3

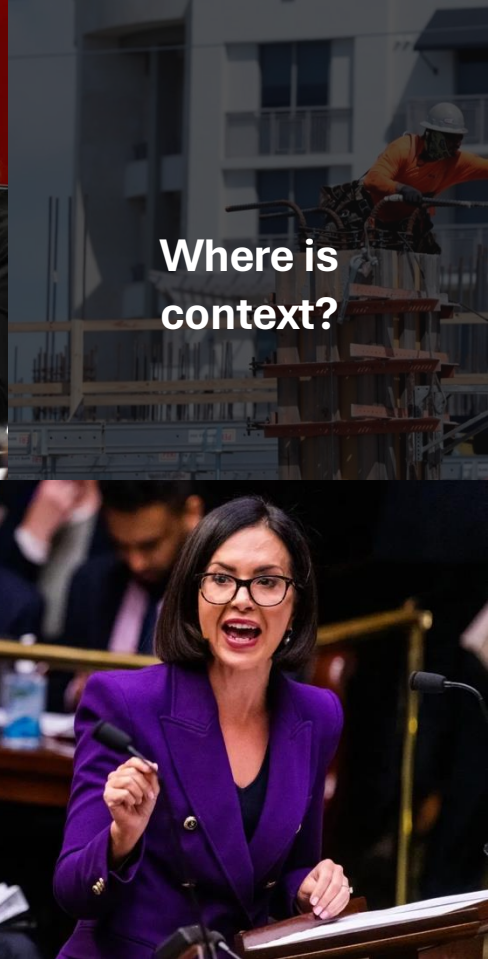
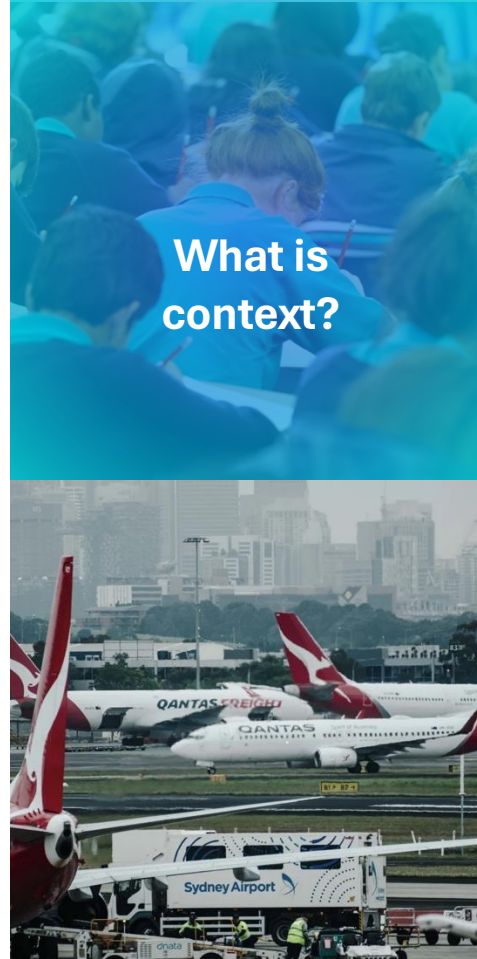


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If context is not merely a passive backdrop for implementation, then **what is it?**
Where is it?



How is context **a constellation of interacting variables?**



THE INNER SETTING

Everything inside the organisation that impacts implementation

INDIVIDUALS

The people responsible for implementing the innovation

THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

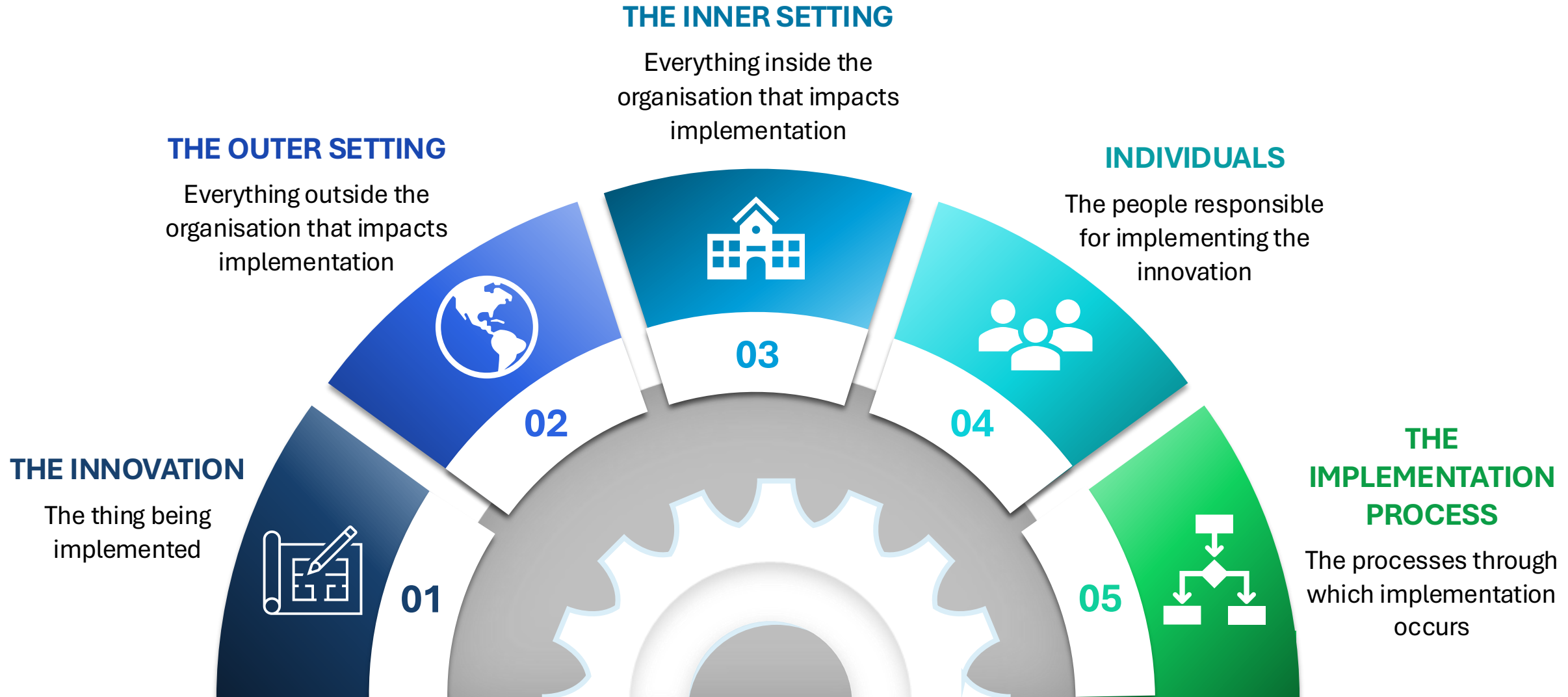
The processes through which implementation occurs

THE OUTER SETTING

Everything outside the organisation that impacts implementation

THE INNOVATION

The thing being implemented



THE CONSOLIDATED FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE RESEARCH (CFIR)

THE INNER SETTING

Everything inside the organisation that impacts implementation

THE OUTER SETTING

Everything outside the organisation that impacts implementation

INDIVIDUALS

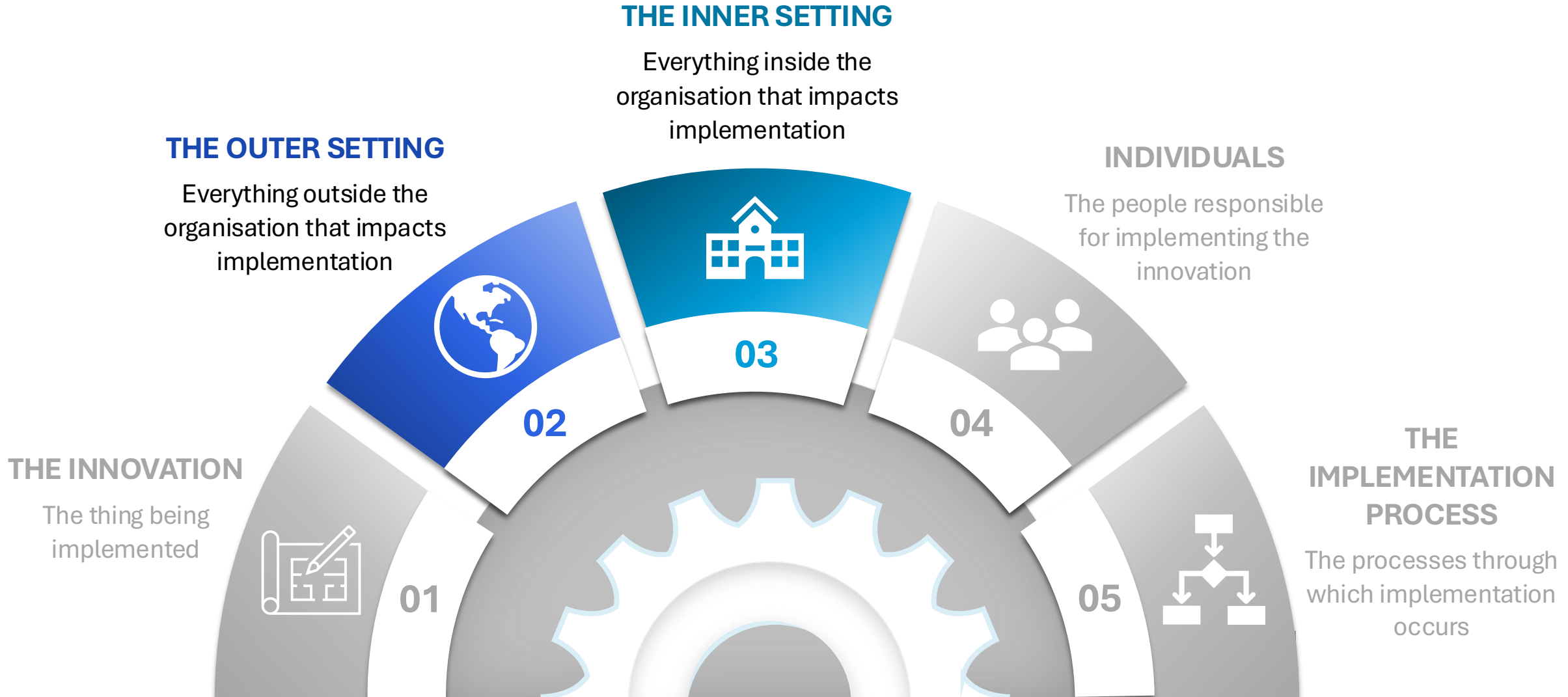
The people responsible for implementing the innovation

THE INNOVATION

The thing being implemented

THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The processes through which implementation occurs



THE CONSOLIDATED FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE RESEARCH (CFIR)



“

Context is often examined separately as compiled lists of important factors, which are not explicitly linked to why these may differ between sites and how they influence the social processes that impact outcomes.

Sarkies et al. 2021, p. 3

**How do we
open up this
black box?**

Variables are
not
mechanisms

**THE
INNOVATION**



01

**THE OUTER
SETTING**



02

**THE INNER
SETTING**



03

INDIVIDUALS

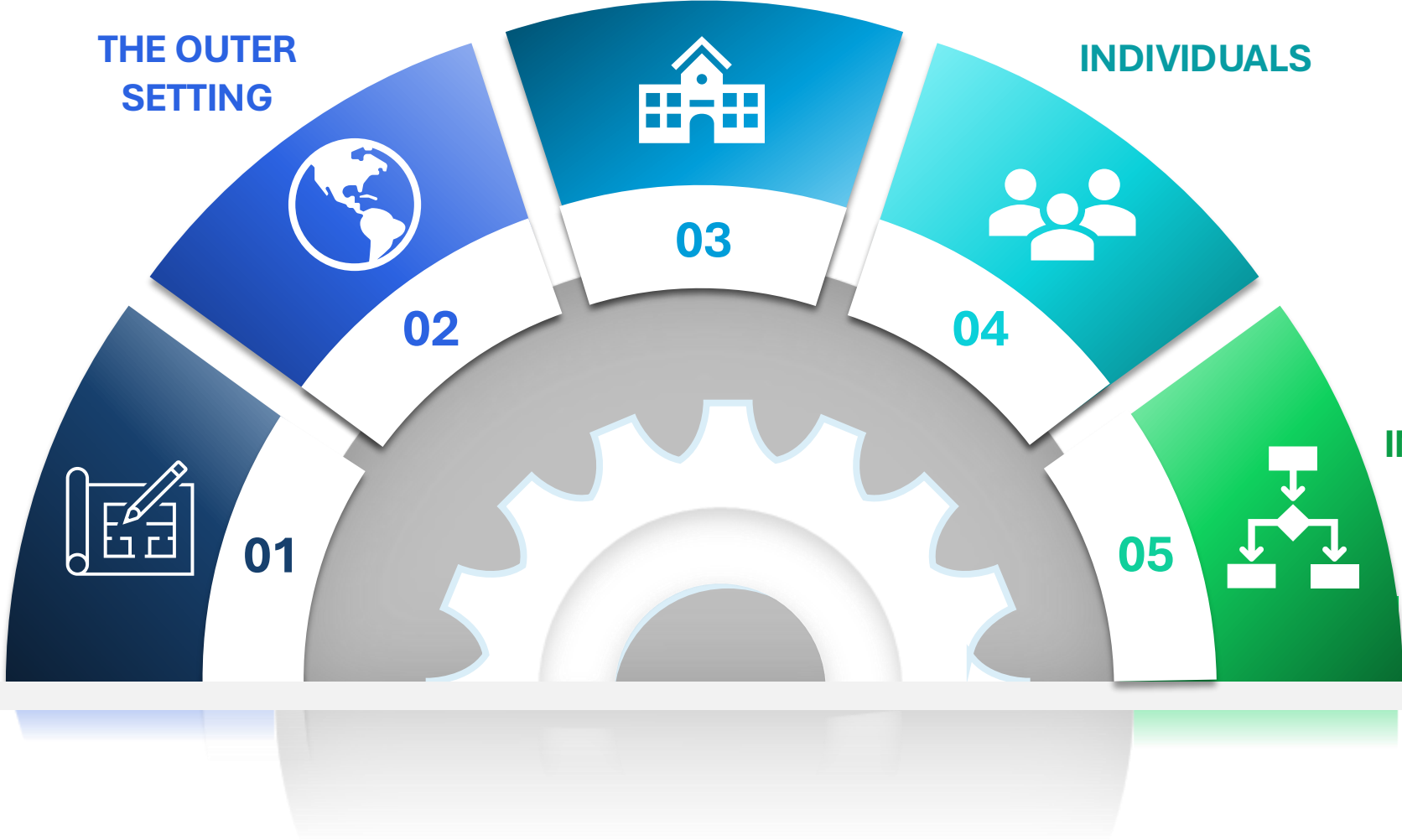


04

**THE
IMPLEMENTATION
PROCESS**

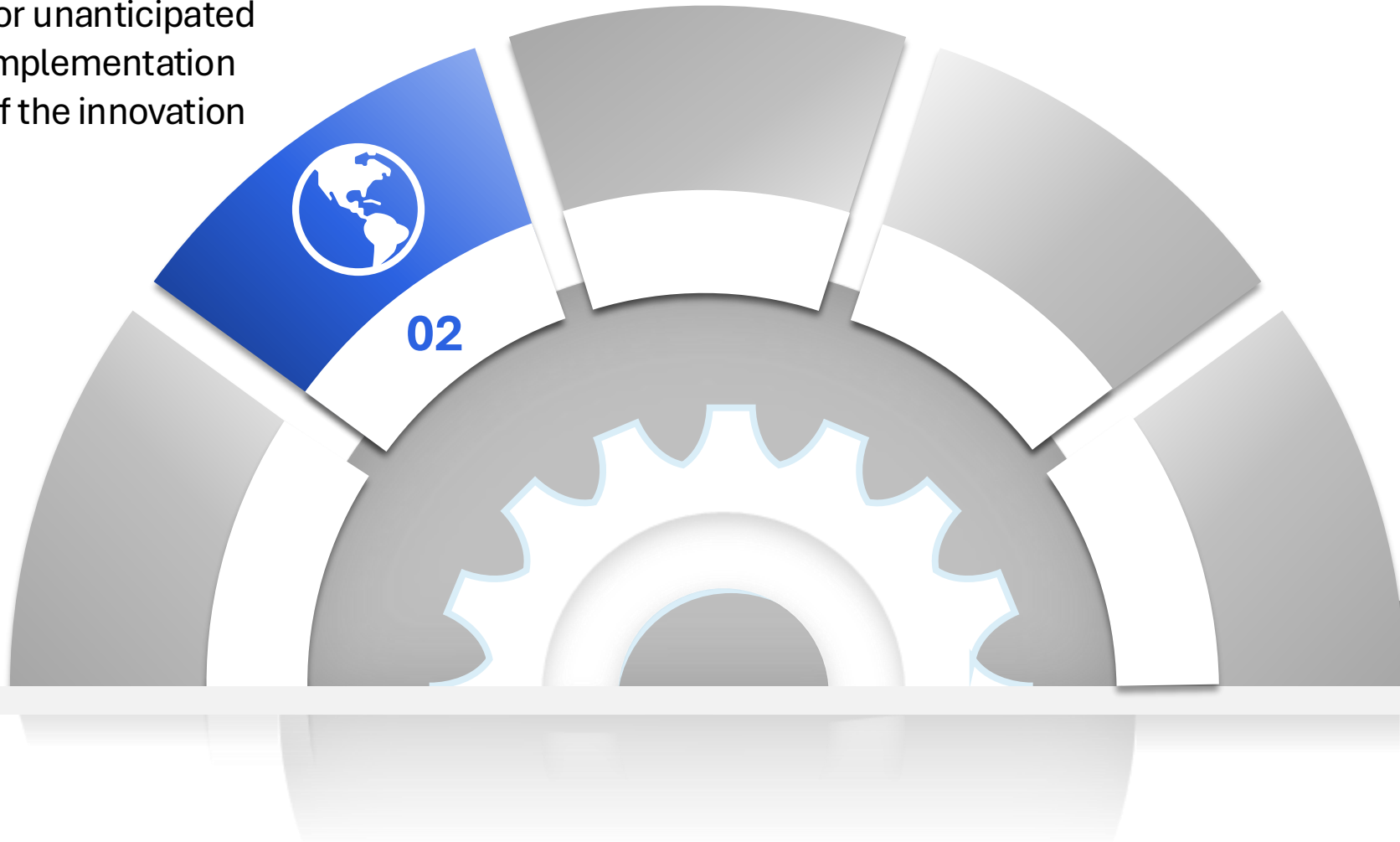


05



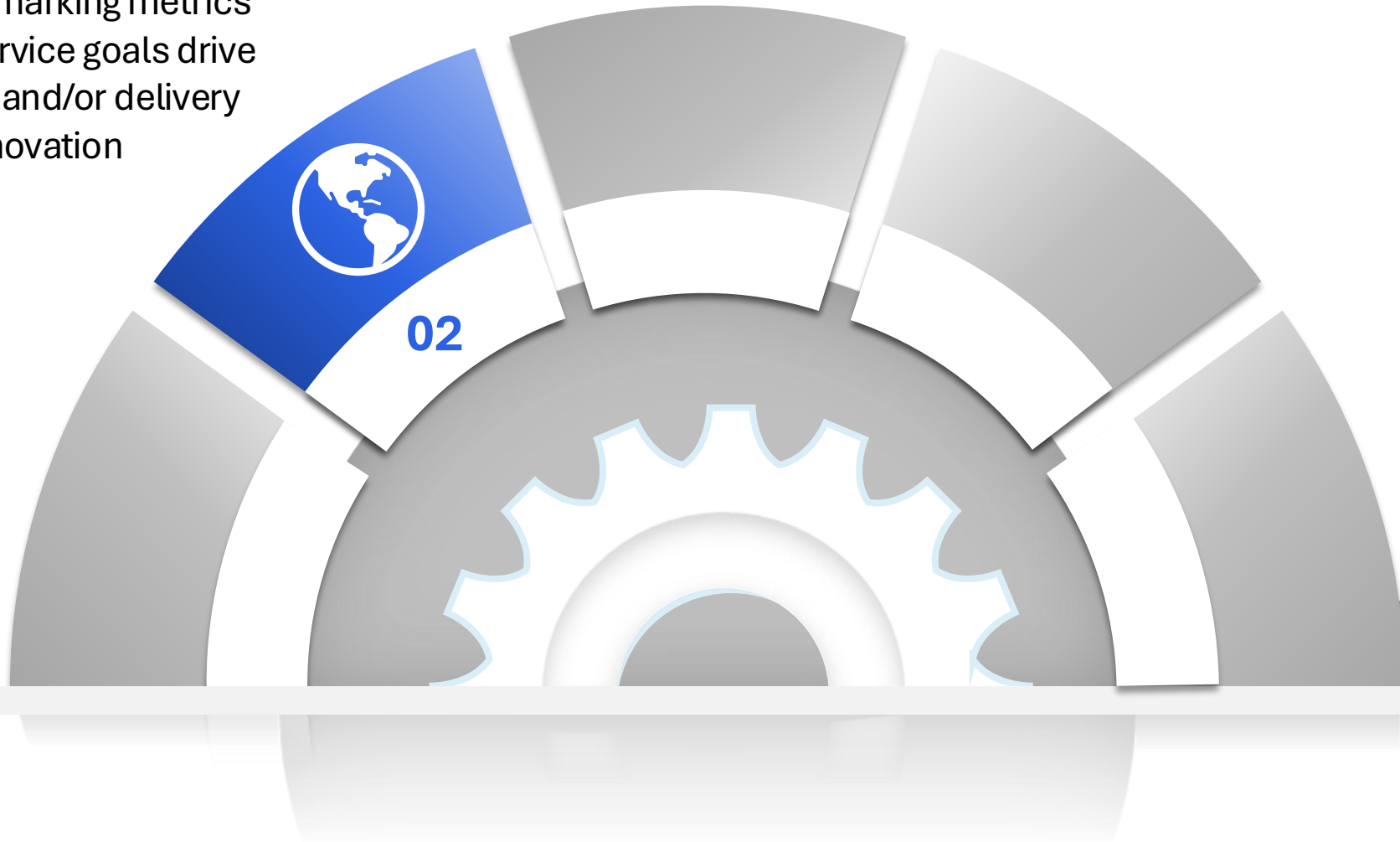
CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Large-scale and/or unanticipated events disrupt implementation and/or delivery of the innovation



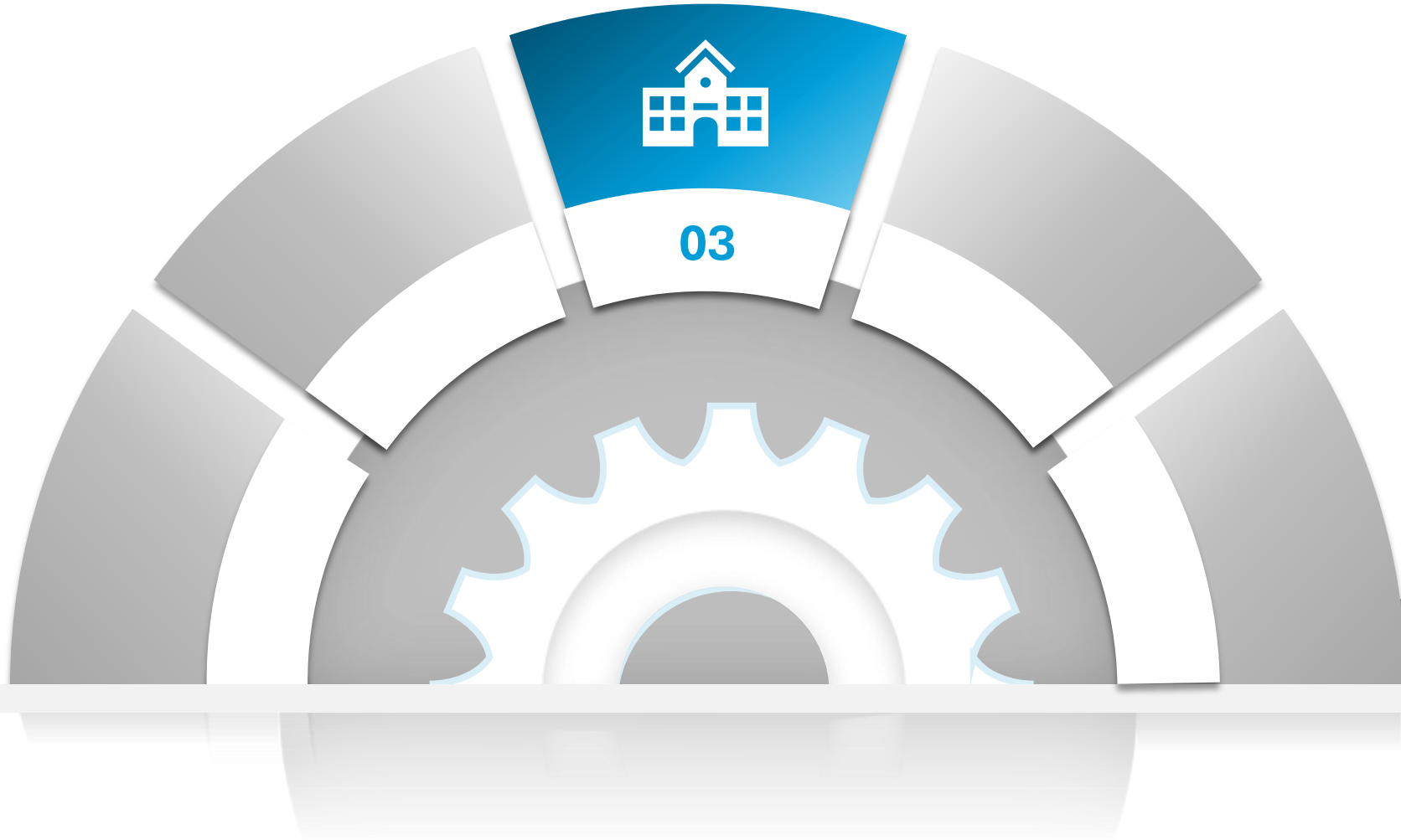
PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT PRESSURE

Quality or benchmarking metrics
or established service goals drive
implementation and/or delivery
of the innovation



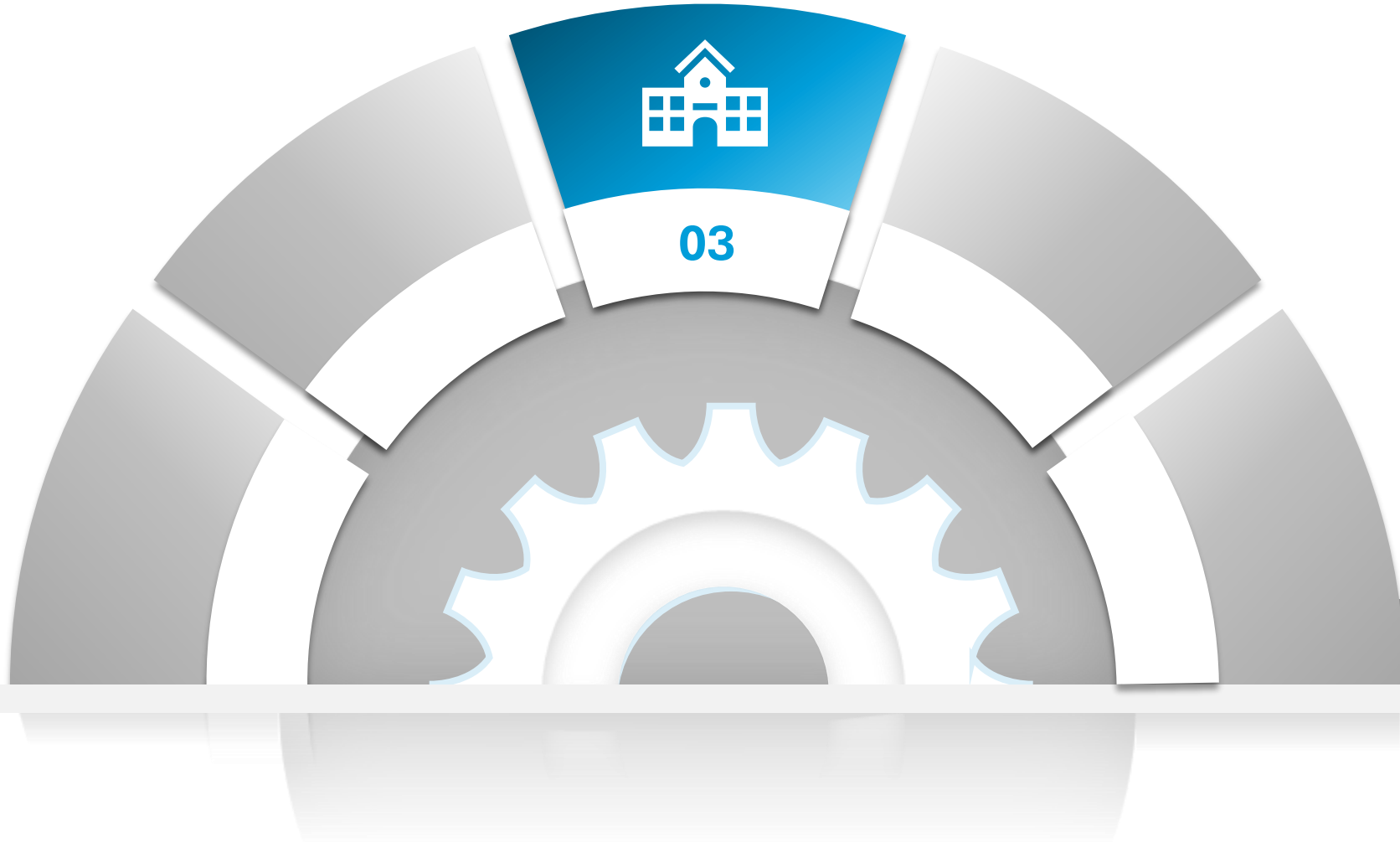
AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Resources are available to
implement and deliver the
innovation



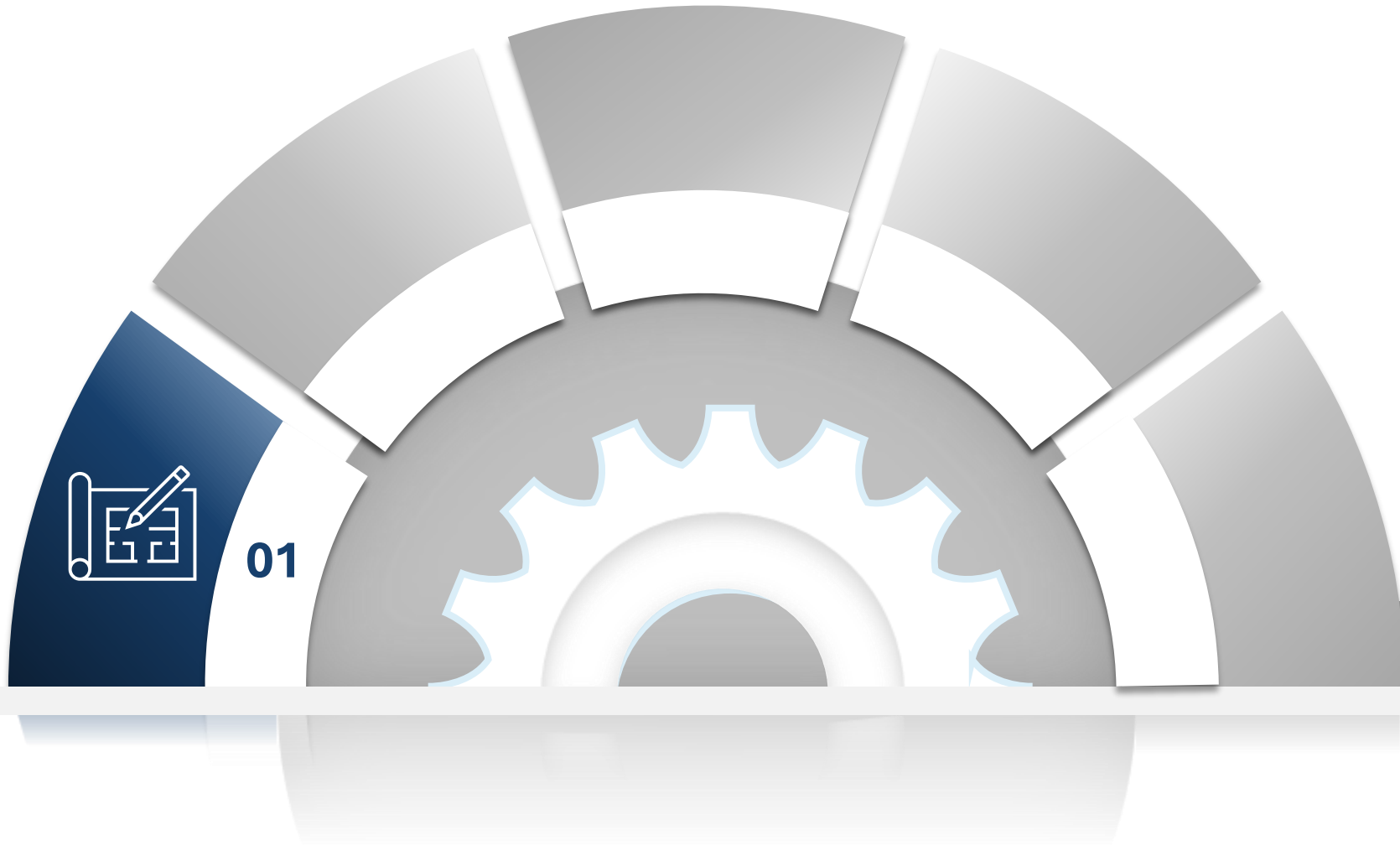
TENSION FOR CHANGE

The current situation is
intolerable and needs to
change



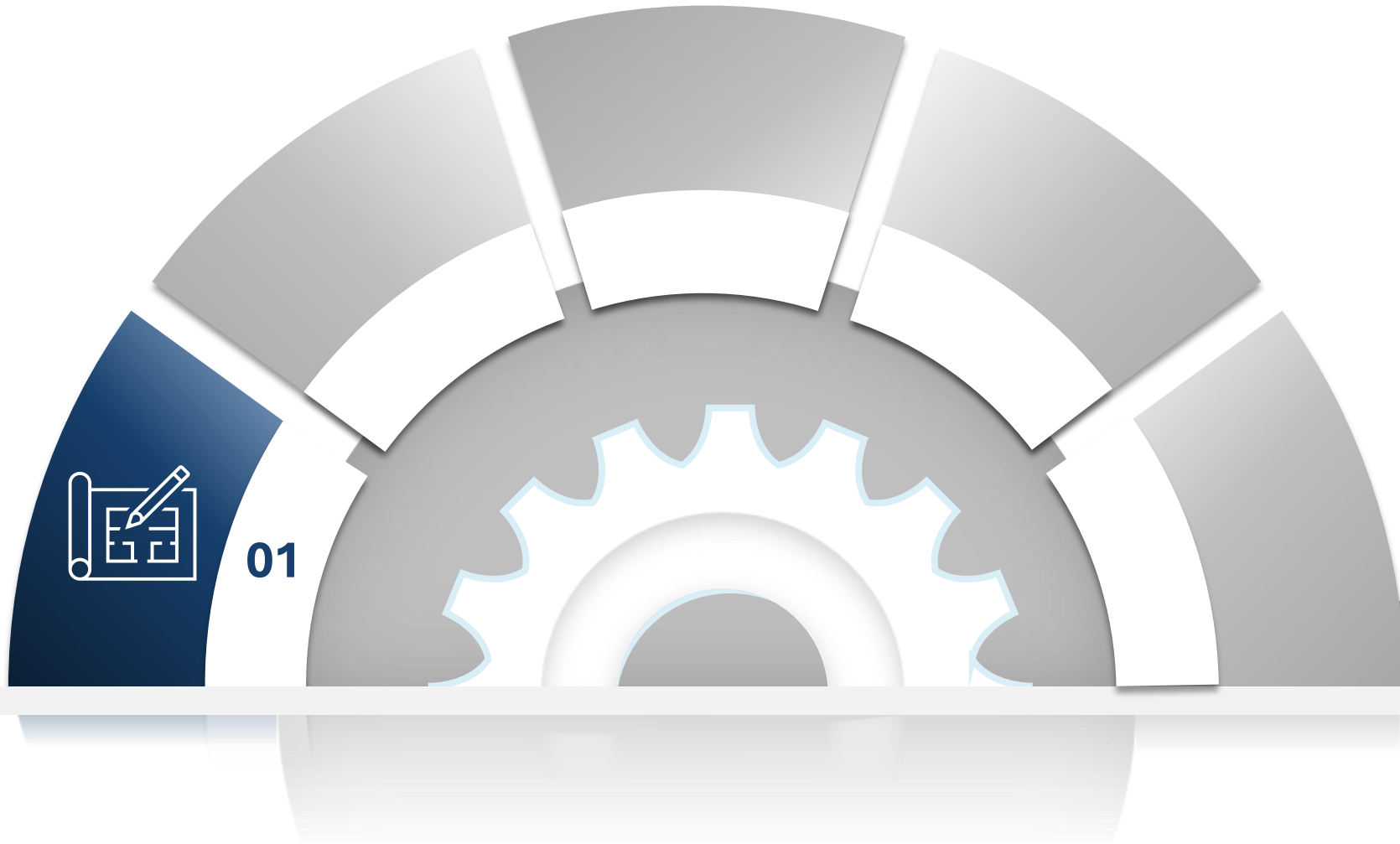
INNOVATION EVIDENCE BASE

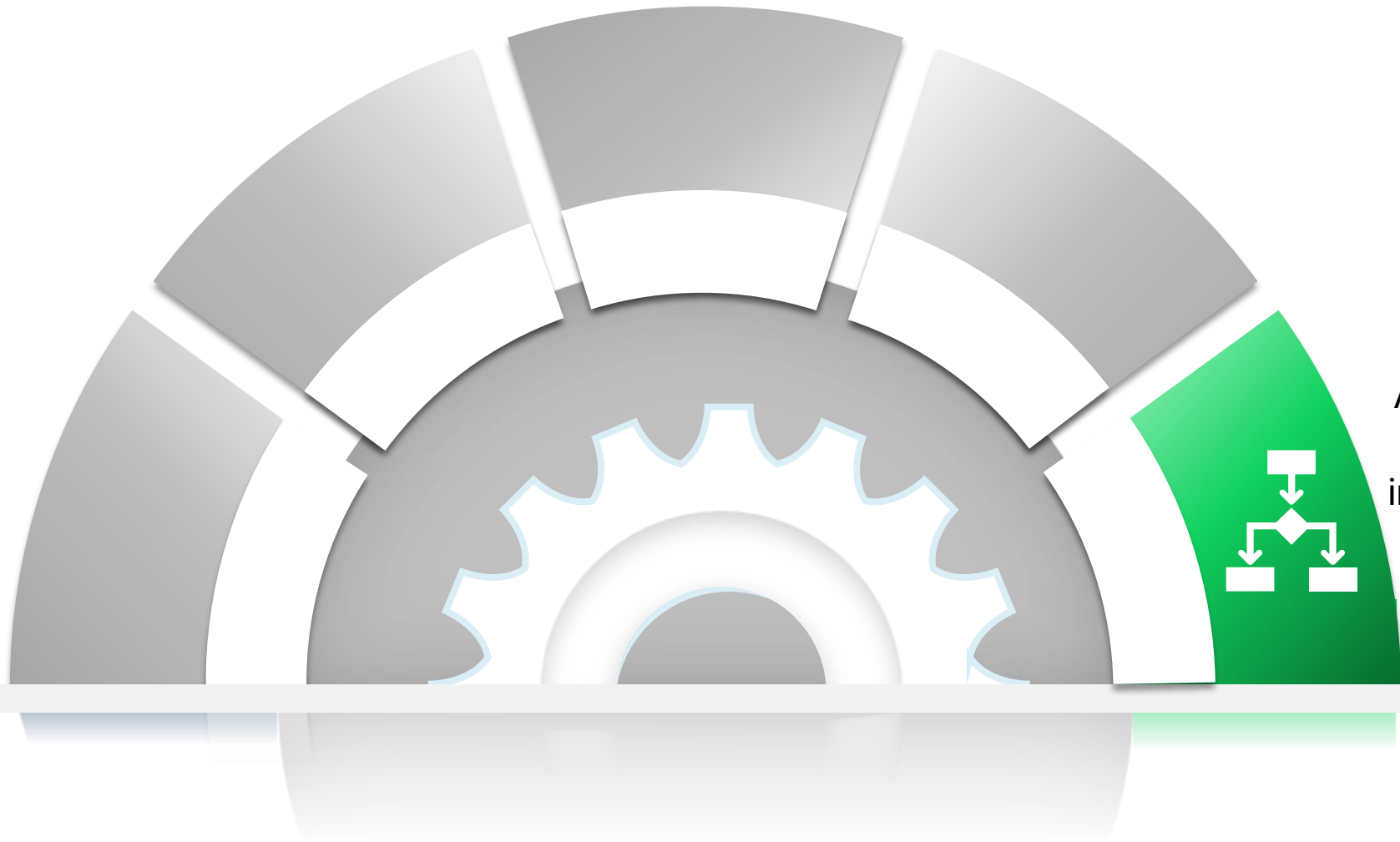
The innovation has
robust evidence
supporting its
effectiveness



INNOVATION ADAPTABILITY

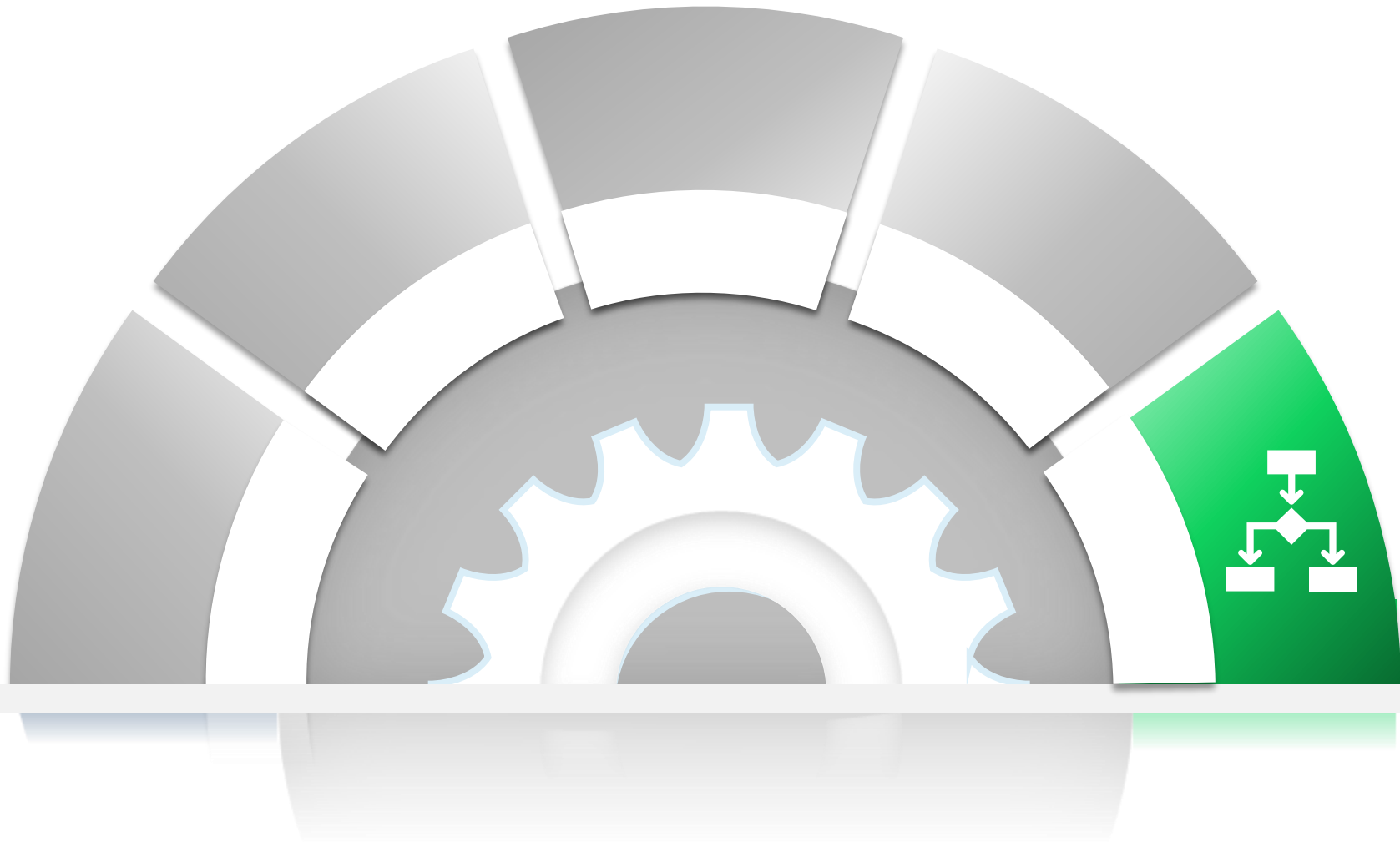
The innovation can
be modified,
tailored, or refined
to fit local context
or needs





ENGAGING

Attract and encourage participation in implementation and/or the innovation



ADAPTING

Modify the innovation and/or the Inner Setting for optimal fit and integration into work processes

**THE
INNOVATION**



01

**THE OUTER
SETTING**



02

**THE INNER
SETTING**



03

INDIVIDUALS

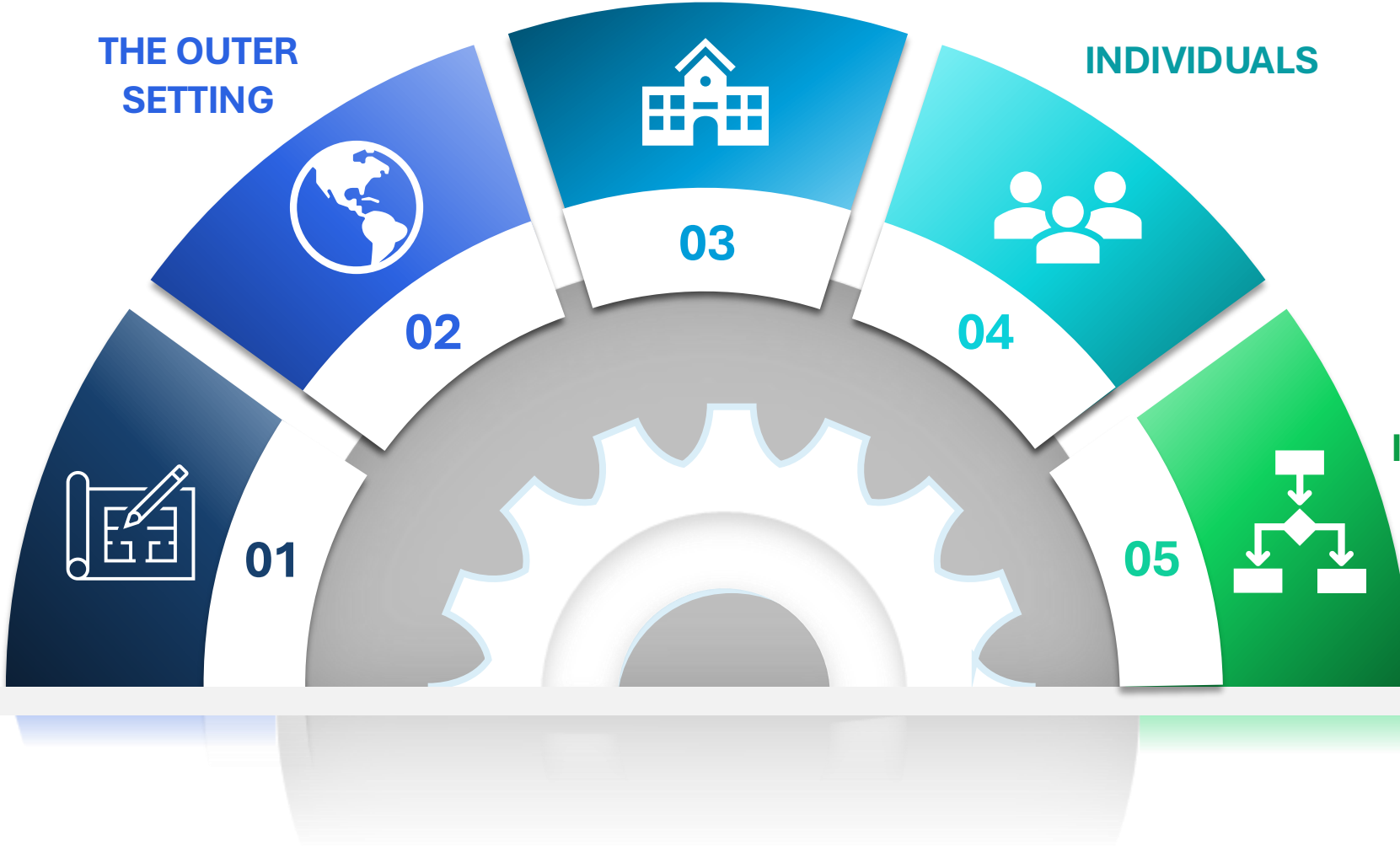


04

**THE
IMPLEMENTATION
PROCESS**



05



01

IF time-poor teachers who are motivated to change [**CONDITION**] believe new programs are likely to yield better results than existing practice [**MECHANISM**], **THEN** they will be more likely to emulate new instructional techniques [**CHANGE**] **BECAUSE** they can achieve results with minimal investment and cost.

02

IF designers provide guidance on how to tailor programs for better fit **[INTERVENTION]**, **THEN** teachers will make fewer inadvertent adaptations **[CHANGE]** **BECAUSE** they will understand which elements to preserve and which to enhance, supplement, replace, delete, and tone down **[MECHANISM]**.

01

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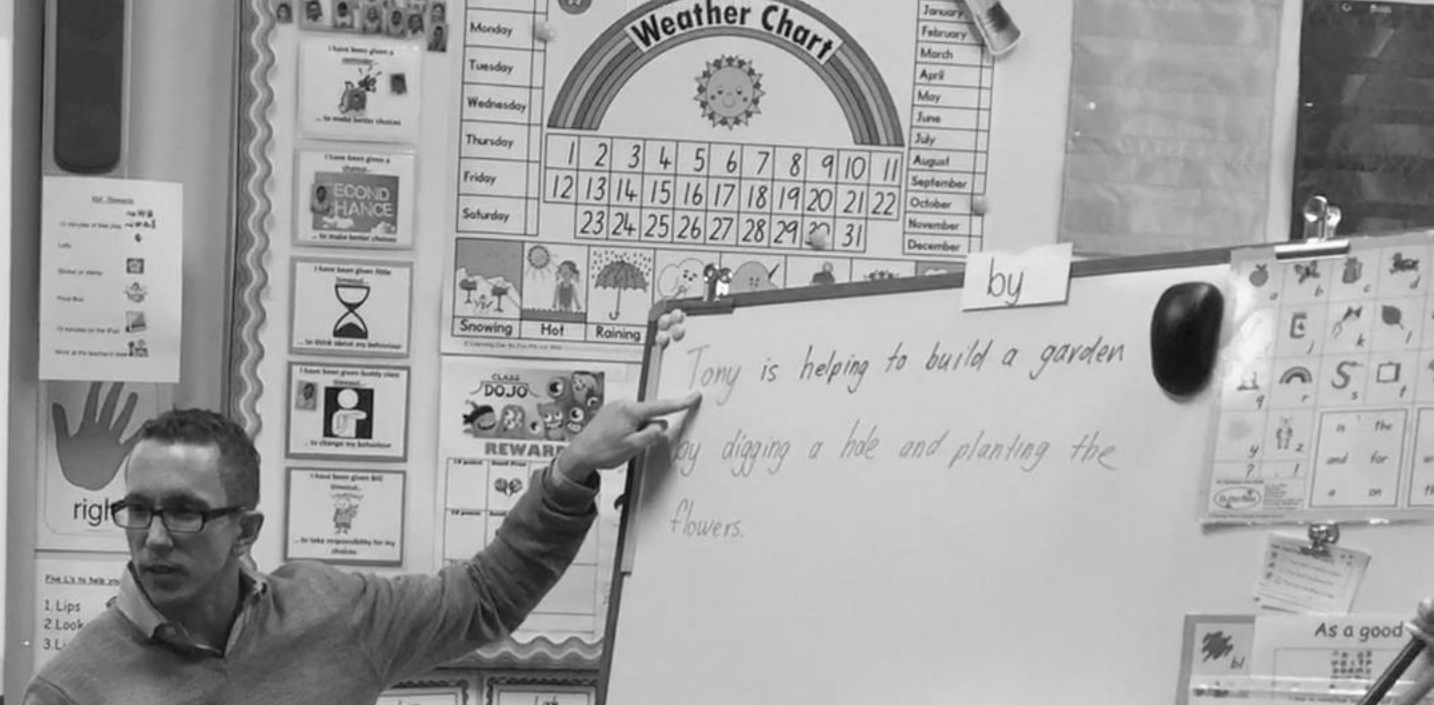


“

Facts do not speak for themselves. Data are not simply collected; they are always constructed. Evidence are always manufactured using a complex apparatus, requiring both material equipment and human manipulation.

Pawson 2024, p.102

How can we be **faithful** to *all* contexts?



We are learning about 'RESPECT'

We are learning about 'PRIDE'

We are learning about 'COURAGE'

Thank you