Hermeneutics (Science of Interpretation) in Inspiration Economy Labs: A Methodological Inquiry into Interpretation of Socioeconomic Problems

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Abstract

This paper investigates the intersection of hermeneutic philosophy and Inspiration Economy Labs practices, specifically examining how hermeneutic principles—the hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons, and the role of pre-understanding—are operationalised within Inspiration Labs to address complex socio-economic problems. The study aims to explicate the interpretive foundations of Inspiration Labs methodology and demonstrate how processes of codification, classification, and stratification constitute a hermeneutic approach to problem-solving that enables the generalisation of solutions across diverse contexts.

The research employs an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology design, consistent with the philosophical foundations under investigation. A multi-case study approach examines Inspiration Labs conducted across multiple countries (Bahrain, Bosnia, Morocco, India, Ghana, Mauritania) between 2015 and 2025, addressing diverse problem domains including poverty elimination, youth development, women's advancement, and public service reform. Analysis of lab documentation on published case studies, and video archives proceeds through three stages: within-case analysis applying the hermeneutic circle, cross-case pattern identification, and theoretical integration with Gadamerian hermeneutics.

The findings suggests that Inspiration Labs operationalize hermeneutic principles through three interconnected processes: (1) codification, which extracts fundamental problem constructs analogous to identifying textual units; (2) classification, which organizes these constructs into interpretive frameworks revealing relationships and patterns; and (3) stratification, which penetrates surface symptoms to uncover generative structures and hidden opportunities that leads to "inspiration currencies."

The hermeneutic circle operates through iterative movement between problem parts and whole context, while the fusion of horizons manifests when diverse stakeholders (economists, sociologists, artists, community members) engage in dialogical meaning-making. Pre-understandings are systematically surfaced and suspended through techniques including "reverse thinking" and "making the familiar strange." The study further reveals that hermeneutic depth enables generalisation not through mechanical solution transfer but through the extraction of transferable insight—inspiration currencies that carry meaning across contexts while remaining attentive to local particularity.

This paper makes several original contributions. First, it provides the first systematic explication of the hermeneutic foundations underlying Inspiration Economy practices, making explicit the interpretive principles implicit in Inspiration Labs' methodology. This make this work more on how of the classical hermeneutic concepts—traditionally applied to textual interpretation can be extended to socio-economic problem-solving, contributing to both hermeneutic theory and innovation methodology. The framework proposed offers an understanding of how generalisation occurs through in-depth interpretation, addressing a fundamental challenge in development practice. It bridges Western hermeneutic tradition with contemporary innovation methodology, creating theoretical resources for both scholars and practitioners.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Challenge of Complex Problem-S olving in Contemporary Society

In an era characterised by accelerating complexity, loss of meaning, increasing uncertainty, and problems interconnectedness, the capacity to solve socio-economic problems has become one of the most critical competencies for individuals, communities, and

institutions, Senoussi (2026). From persistent poverty and youth unemployment to institutional inefficiency and environmental degradation, contemporary challenges resist simple technical solutions. They are, in Rittel and Webber's (1973) classic formulation, "wicked problems"—dynamic, context-dependent, and resistant to resolution through linear, reductionist approaches. [21]

Traditional problem-solving methodologies, rooted in positivist assumptions and mechanical models, have proven inadequate in the face of such complexity. These approaches typically seek pre-packaged solutions, imported from external contexts and applied with insufficient attention to local meaning, cultural specificity, and the lived experience of those embedded within the problem. The result is often solution failure, wasted resources, and deepened community cynicism toward development interventions. Buheji (2026a), Buheji (2026b). [9, 10]

1.2. The Emergence of Inspiration Economy and Inspiration Labs

Against this backdrop, the Inspiration Economy emerged as an alternative paradigm for socio-economic development. Founded by the author in Bahrain in the early 2010s, the Inspiration Economy is built on a fundamental premise: that every individual and community possesses "great unexplored energies," and that complex problems themselves carry within them the seeds of their own solutions (Buheji, 2017; Buheji & Ahmed, 2018). [4, 11] The task, therefore, is not to import solutions from outside but to extract them from within—through disciplined and multidisciplined engagement with the problem's internal structure, its context, and the hidden opportunities it contains. Buheji (2016), Buheji and Ahmed (2019), Buheji (2021), Buheji (2025), [3, 12, 6, 8]

The primary vehicle for this work is the Inspiration Lab—a structured yet flexible methodology for collective problem-solving that has been implemented across more than twenty countries since 2015. As documented in the extensive portfolio of Inspiration Labs (International Institute of Inspiration Economy, 2024), these interventions have addressed diverse challenges including poverty elimination in Mauritania, youth migration in Bosnia, women's development in Bahrain, self-sufficiency in Ghana and India, and public service reform across multiple sectors. The labs have generated not only practical solutions but also "inspiration currencies"—transferable insights and value that extend beyond immediate problem resolution, Buheji (2018). [5]

1.3. The Unexamined Philosophical Foundations

Despite this rich practice and documented impact, the philosophical foundations of Inspiration Lab methodology have remained largely implicit and unexamined. The extensive literature on Inspiration Economy (Buheji, 2017, 2021, 2025, 2026; Buheji & Ahmed, 2018, 2019) provides detailed accounts of lab processes, outcomes, and applications but does not explicitly articulate the interpretive theory underlying these practices. [4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12] This gap is significant for several reasons, one because without explicit philosophical grounding, the methodology risks being misunderstood as merely another set of techniques, for example as a toolkit rather than a coherent approach to understanding and acting in the world. The other reason is the absence of theoretical articulation limits the methodology's transferability, as practitioners cannot fully grasp why certain practices work and how to adapt them to new contexts. The third reason is the rich conceptual resources of interpretive philosophy remain untapped, depriving Inspiration Economy of potential insights and theoretical refinement. Smith *et al*. (2009) [23]

1.4. The Promise of Hermeneutics

This paper proposes that hermeneutics—the philosophy of interpretation—provides the theoretical framework needed to articulate and deepen understanding of the Inspiration Lab methodology. Hermeneutics, originating in the interpretation of sacred texts and developed through the work of Heidegger, and Gadamer into a comprehensive philosophy of understanding, offers precisely the conceptual resources required. Heidegger (1962), Gadamer's (1975). [17, 14]

The hermeneutic tradition addresses questions central to Inspiration Lab practice, such as ‘how does understanding occur’. It shows how the hermeneutic circle, the iterative movement between the parts and the whole, enables meaning to emerge. Through Gadamer's (1975) theory of the fusion of horizons, the dialogical encounter between interpreter and text (or between diverse stakeholders) generates new meaning. [14]

The hermeneutic addresses also how pre-existing assumptions shape what we can see. Through attention to prejudice and pre-understanding as conditions of understanding rather than obstacles. How does understanding relate to action? Through the hermeneutic insight that genuine understanding always involves application, we understand a situation by understanding how to act within it. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2019). [24]

These questions mirror precisely the challenges faced in Inspiration Labs: understanding complex problems, integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives, surfacing hidden assumptions, and translating insight into action.

1.5. The Research Gap and Questions

Preliminary engagement with both hermeneutic and Inspiration Economy literatures reveal a striking gap. While Inspiration Lab practices implicitly embody hermeneutic principles—as suggested by concepts such as "problem visualisation," "construct division," "blind spot identification," and "reverse thinking"—this connection has never been systematically articulated. Conversely, hermeneutic scholarship, despite its extensive application to fields such as law, theology, literature, and the human sciences, has rarely been extended to the domain of socioeconomic problem-solving. Linden and Cybulski's (2006) application of hermeneutics to pattern mining in software development and Zwier's (2015) use of Ricœurian hermeneutics in mediation represent notable exceptions, but the systematic application of hermeneutic concepts to development practice and innovation methodology remains underexplored. [20, 27] Ahmed and Buheji (2018). [11]

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by investigating the following research questions:

1.5.1. Primary Research Question

The primary focus of this research is on how hermeneutic principles are operationalised within Inspiration Labs to enable deep problem-solving and solution generalisation.

1.5.2. Secondary Research Questions

The secondary focus of this work tries to address how the processes of codification, classification, and stratification in Inspiration Labs correspond to hermeneutic concepts of textual interpretation. The other query would be focused on how the hermeneutic circle manifest in the iterative movement between problem parts and the whole context within Inspiration Labs. More deeply, the paper explores how Gadamer's fusion of horizons occurs when diverse stakeholders engage in collective meaning-making within lab settings. Besides, the 'pre-understandings' and 'mental blocks' would be checked if they are surfaced, suspended, and transformed through the Inspiration Lab processes. Last but not least, we would explore the hermeneutic depth and its generalisation of solutions across contexts, including the generation of "inspiration currencies". Gadamer (1975). [14]

1.6. Terminologies Used in this Paper

Throughout this paper the following terminologies are used repeatedly:

Hermeneutics: The philosophy of interpretation, concerned with the nature of understanding and its conditions

Inspiration Economy: The socioeconomic paradigm developed by the author, focuses on extracting value from problems and cultivating human capacity

Inspiration Labs: Structured methodologies for collective problem-solving that embody Inspiration Economy principles to create a significant outcome and development.

Inspiration Currencies: Transferable insights and value generated through deep engagement with problems

Codification, Classification, Stratification: The three core processes through which Inspiration Labs operationalise hermeneutic interpretation

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hermeneutics and the Inspiration Economy

Hermeneutics (or The Science of Interpretation) is, in its simplest definition, the theory and methodology of interpretation, and specifically the interpretation of texts. However, it is more than just a method for reading a book; it is a philosophy concerned with the nature of understanding itself, how it occurs, and what its conditions and limits are. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2019). [24]

Hermeneutics is the philosophical reflection on the process of understanding. It tells us: when you read a text, you do not record the meaning as it is, but rather enter into a dialogue with it. You carry your preconceptions, you encounter the world of the text, and from this interaction, a new meaning is born. It is the answer to the question: "How do we understand? And what does it mean to understand?" Hermeneutics as a concept can be broken down into several levels:

2.1.1. Linguistic and Historical Origin of Hermeneutics

The word is derived from the Greek verb "hermeneuein," which means "to interpret" or "to clarify." It is associated with the name of the god Hermes, the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology. Hermes' function was to translate the messages of the gods (an incomprehensible language) into the language of humans (a comprehensible language). This bridge between different worlds is the essence of hermeneutics.

Historically, Hermeneutics was used exclusively to interpret sacred religious texts (the Bible) or classical legal texts. The goal was to uncover the "true meaning" or the "intention of God/author" hidden within the text. In the 18th and 19th centuries, philosophers like Schleiermacher and Dilthey expanded its scope to become the "art of general understanding," i.e., a methodology for all human sciences (history, law, art, literature) as opposed to the natural sciences, which rely on causal explanation.

2.1.2. Basic Concepts and Main Themes

In the 20th century, hermeneutics transformed from a mere methodology into an existential philosophy thanks to major philosophers, revolving around several key concepts:

The Hermeneutic Circle: This is the most important concept. It is the idea that understanding the whole (the entire text) comes from understanding its parts (words and sentences), and understanding the parts comes from understanding the whole. We do not start from a vacuum; we come to the text with preconceptions (ideas, culture, experiences) called "pre-understandings." Then we read the text, which modifies these conceptions, and we return to the text with a new understanding, and so on in an ascending circular motion. Buheji (2026b) [10]

Fusion of Horizons: Introduced by the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Understanding does not mean cancelling ourselves (our current cognitive and cultural horizon) to enter the author's mind, Gadamer (1989). [15] Understanding is a dialogical process in which a "fusion" occurs between the horizon of the text (representing the past and the author) and the horizon of the reader (representing the present and the interpreter). Meaning is born from this encounter, not merely latent within the text. Gadamer (1975). [14]

Hermeneutics as an Existential Philosophy: With Martin Heidegger, hermeneutics was no longer just a method for interpreting texts, but became a description of how human beings exist in the world. We are constantly "interpreting beings"; all our actions and our understanding of the world are a continuous process of interpretation. Smith *et al*. (2009) [23]

2.1.3. Fundamental Questions Posed by Hermeneutics

1. Does meaning reside within the text (in the author's intention) or is it produced during reading (in the reader's interaction with the text)?
2. How can we guarantee the objectivity of interpretation? Is objectivity even possible? (Hermeneuticians believe that complete neutrality is impossible because the interpreter brings their background, which shapes their understanding).
3. What happens when we understand a text or a work of art from a different era or a different culture? How do we overcome temporal and cultural differences?
4. What is the role of language? Language is not just a tool for communication, but the medium in which understanding fundamentally occurs.

2.1.4. Key Figures in its History

1. **Friedrich Schleiermacher:** Established modern hermeneutics as a general methodology for understanding.
2. **Wilhelm Dilthey:** Made it the foundation of the "human sciences" (sciences of the spirit), distinguishing them from the natural sciences.
3. **Martin Heidegger:** Turned it from an epistemological methodology into an existential philosophy.
4. **Hans-Georg Gadamer:** Developed the concept of the "fusion of horizons" and re-evaluated the positive role of traditions and prejudices as conditions for understanding.
5. **Paul Ricœur:** Attempted to reconcile different currents and was interested in the conflict of interpretations (an interpretation that seeks to reconstruct meaning and an interpretation that suspects apparent meanings). Gadamer, H. G. (1975). [14]

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Paradigm: Interpretive Hermeneutic Phenomenology

This study adopts an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology as its overarching research paradigm, Van Manen (2016). [25] This approach is particularly appropriate since it investigates how hermeneutic principles operate within Inspiration Labs, and how employing a hermeneutic methodology creates coherence between the research method and the phenomenon under study, Van Manen (2016). [25] This hermeneutic phenomenology, as developed by Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1975), seeks to understand how meaning emerges from lived experience—precisely what occurs when diverse stakeholders in Inspiration Labs engage with complex problems. [17, 14]

This research paradigm acknowledges that the researcher brings pre-understandings to the inquiry, which aligns with Gadamer's concept that prejudices are conditions of understanding rather than obstacles. As Ahmed and Buheji (2018) demonstrated in their study of reflexivity in Inspiration Economy research, interpretive approaches that involve researchers in collecting and analysing data while acknowledging social and cultural contexts yield a richer understanding of complex socioeconomic phenomena. Gadamer (1975), Buheji (2026b). [14, 10]

3.2. Research Design: Multi-Case Study Approach

This study employs a qualitative multi-case study design (Yin, 2014) [26] to investigate how hermeneutic principles manifest across different Inspiration Lab contexts. The multi-case design enables cross-case comparison to identify patterns and variations in how hermeneutic principles are operationalised. The theoretical replication to test whether findings hold across diverse settings. The depth of analysis within each case, while maintaining analytic rigour across cases.

3.2.1. Case Selection Criteria

Table 1: Propose how the cases will be selected purposively in this paper and based on specific Criteria and Rationale:

Criterion	Rationale
Geographic diversity	Labs from different countries (e.g., Bahrain, Bosnia, Morocco, India, Ghana, Mauritania) to examine how cultural contexts shape interpretive processes
Problem domain variety	Labs addressing different problem types (poverty elimination, youth development, women's advancement, public services) to assess the transferability of hermeneutic principles
Temporal range	Labs conducted between 2015-2025 to capture the evolution of methodology
Documentation richness	Labs with comprehensive documentation (publications, reports, video records) to enable deep analysis
Stakeholder diversity	Labs involving varied participant compositions to examine the fusion of horizons across different stakeholder groups

3.3. Data Collection Methods

Table 2: Illustrates the Sources used in building up this research and the justification of why they are chosen

Source	Description	Purpose
Lab documentation	Internal reports, problem statements, solution frameworks, and impact assessments from selected labs	To trace the interpretive journey from problem deconstruction to solution reconstruction
Published case studies	Peer-reviewed articles and book chapters documenting Inspiration Lab outcomes (as listed in your previous files)	To supplement primary data with documented evidence
Video recordings	Archived recordings of lab sessions and presentations (as referenced in your earlier documents)	To observe non-verbal dimensions of interpretive processes
Researcher reflexivity journals	Systematic documentation of researcher's own pre-understandings and evolving interpretations throughout the study	To address Gadamer's requirement that interpreters appropriate their own horizon

3.4. Data Analysis Framework

The analysis will proceed through two stages, each corresponding to hermeneutic principles.

3.4.1. Stage 1: Within-Case Analysis (The Hermeneutic Circle)

Each case will be analysed individually using a hermeneutic approach:

1. **First-Pass Reading:** Initial engagement with all case materials to gain a holistic understanding
2. **Identification of Parts:** Extracting discrete elements—problem statements, participant interactions, solution components, outcomes

3. **Movement to Whole:** Relating parts to the case context, institutional setting, and broader socioeconomic conditions
4. **Iterative Revision:** Returning repeatedly to materials as understanding deepens

This process operationalises the hermeneutic circle at the case level, ensuring that understanding emerges through sustained interpretive engagement rather than linear analysis. Smith *et al*. (2009) [23]

3.4.2. Stage 2: Cross-Case Analysis (Pattern Recognition)

Table 3: Based on the Cross-Case Analysis, the pattern recognition would be Identified

Analytic Focus	Hermeneutic Principle	Research Question
Patterns in codification practices	Identifying textual units	How do different labs extract fundamental constructs from complex problems?
Classification frameworks	Finding textual coherence	What classification schemes emerge across cases, and what do they reveal about interpretive choices?
Stratification depth	Reaching deep meaning	How do labs penetrate surface symptoms to uncover generative structures and hidden opportunities?
Fusion of horizons	Dialogue across perspectives	How do diverse stakeholder perspectives merge to generate new meaning?
Inspiration currencies	Application as understanding	What transferable insights emerge, and how are they codified for use across contexts?

3.5. Core Methodology Design Purpose

This methodology is designed to:

1. Align philosophically with hermeneutic principles while maintaining empirical rigour
2. Capture the layered meanings embedded in Inspiration Lab practices
3. Enable generalisation through systematic cross-case analysis
4. Acknowledge researcher positionality while maintaining analytic discipline
5. Provide replicable procedures for future researchers Yin (2014)

Figure (1) demonstrates how the hermeneutic circle operates dynamically within Inspiration Labs. The process begins with the 'Problem as Text (The Whole)' where the initial holistic encounter with the socio-economic challenge. Through 'Codification', parts are extracted from the whole, breaking the problem into analysable constructs. 'Classification' then organizes these parts, identifying relationships and establishing coherence among the extracted elements. Then, 'Stratification' penetrates deeper layers, moving beyond surface organization to uncover hidden meaning and generative structures.

Crucially, the process in Figure (1) does not end here—there is an 'Iterative Return to the Whole', where understanding gained from parts is brought back to reconsider the problem in its totality. Each return deepens understanding, refining both perception of parts and comprehension of whole. This cyclical movement continues until reaching 'Solution as Reconstructed Meaning' which is not a superficial fix but a transformed understanding that carries the depth achieved through sustained interpretive engagement. This Figure visualizes how the hermeneutic circle is not merely theoretical but operationalized through concrete lab processes, generating genuine understanding through disciplined, iterative interpretation.

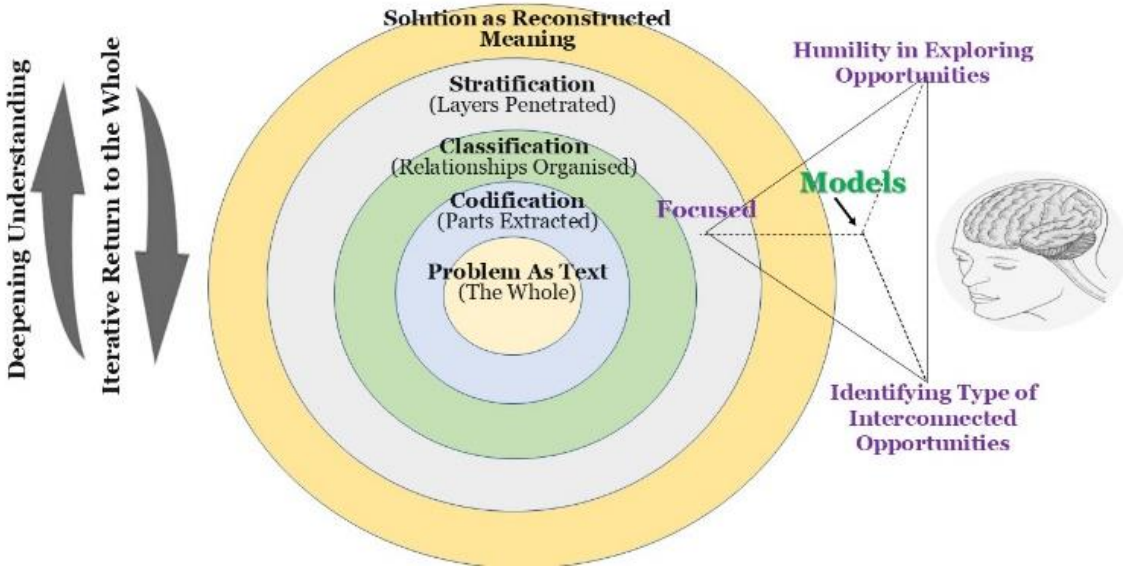

Fig 1: The Hermeneutic Circle in Action

4. Application of Hermeneutical Principles in Inspiration Labs

Since its inception, the "International Institute of Inspiration Economy," has indeed developed a practical methodology for solving complex problems in what are called "Inspiration Labs." This methodology is based on the application of hermeneutical principles, even if not explicitly stated in this academic terminology.

4.1. The Core of the Problem: Why Do Complex Problems Need "Interpretation"?

Complex problems (in economy, society, environment) do not come with ready-made solutions. They are akin to an "ambiguous text" or an "incomplete message." The traditional methodology seeks pre-packaged solutions (a mechanical model). The Inspiration Economy methodology, however, is based on the idea that every individual or society possesses "great unexplored energies," and that the problem itself carries within it the seeds of the solution, but it needs someone to "interpret" it correctly.

4.2. Applying the Hermeneutic Circle in Inspiration Labs

As mentioned earlier, the hermeneutic circle is based on 'a continuous movement between the part and the whole'. This is the backbone of the work in Inspiration Labs. Here are the stages that apply this philosophy in Inspiration Economy approaches:

4.2.1. Observation (Collecting "Parts"):

The process begins with a deliberate phase of observation. Here, the "parts" of the problem are gathered in small details, subtle signals, field notes, points that were not previously targeted. These parts are like the initial "words" of the text they are trying to read. Buheji (2024) [7].

4.2.2. Synthesising, Realising, Reflecting, and Associating (Understanding the "Whole"):

After collecting observations, the "understanding" phase begins, which they call "perception/cognition." Here, these parts are analysed, linking them to each other and simultaneously linking them to "the bigger picture" or "the higher value." The bigger picture serves as the "whole" or the general context that gives meaning to the parts. This dialectical connection between details (the part) and the overarching vision (the whole) is the heart of the hermeneutic circle. Buheji (2024), [7].

4.3. "Fusion of Horizons" and Reverse Thinking

In Gadamerian hermeneutics, understanding occurs when the "horizon" of the reader (interpreter) merges with the "horizon" of the text. In Inspiration Labs, this principle is applied in an innovative way called "Reverse Thinking" which is the assumption that the "inspiring idea" or "solution" already exists, and then working backward to understand how it can be achieved. It is a fusion between the current reality (with its problems) and a future vision (with its possibilities). The knowledge and experiences are not ignored, nor the reality of place and time, but rather creates a dialogical space between them to generate a new meaning, which is the "solution." Fartookzadeh *et al*. (2024) [13].

Figure (2) establishes the philosophical grounding of the Inspiration Lab methodology in Gadamerian hermeneutics. It shows the three core concepts form the theoretical foundation. The first is the 'Hermeneutic Circle' which represents the iterative movement between parts and whole, where understanding emerges through continuous return—each encounter deepens comprehension of both the specific elements and the broader context. Then we go through the 'Fusion of Horizons' captures the dialogical encounter between diverse perspectives; when stakeholders with different backgrounds engage authentically, their distinct horizons merge to create what the paper terms an "interpretive explosion"—new meaning that no single participant could have generated alone.

The third philosophical grounding is the 'Pre-Understanding' acknowledges that interpreters bring assumptions and mental blocks to any act of understanding. Rather than viewing these as obstacles, hermeneutics recognizes them as conditions of understanding that must be surfaced and suspended through techniques such as epoché (suspension of certainties). Together, these concepts provide the philosophical lens through which Inspiration Labs operationalize interpretive problem-solving. Buheji (2026a) [9].

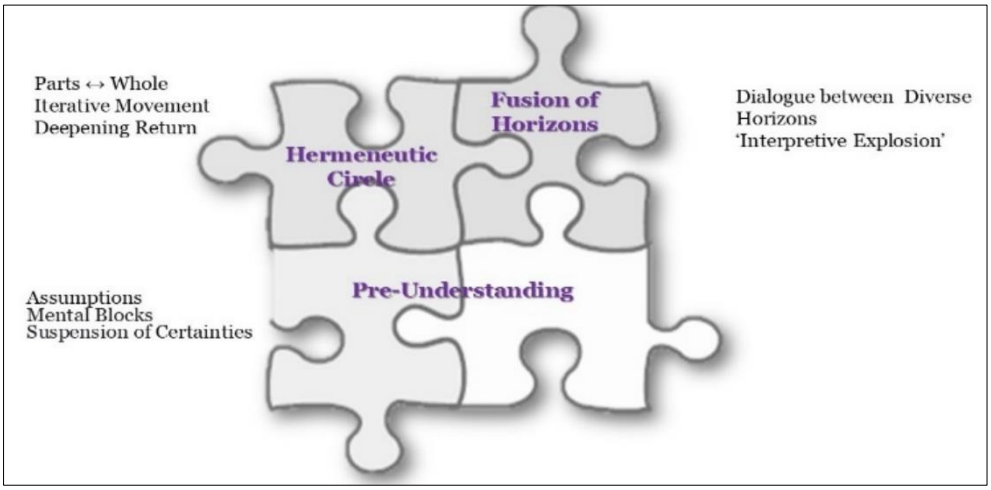

Fig 2: Theoretical Foundations (Gadamerian Hermeneutics)

4.4. The Lab as a Hermeneutical Space

Inspiration Labs are not necessarily a physical place, but rather a "hermeneutical space" aiming to transform individual exploration into collective exploration. This ensures a multiplicity of horizons and prevents reducing the problem to a single vision, which enriches the interpretive process. Hermeneutical space created by the lab brings with it also free work models with abundance thinking that would see many hidden resources. That is, thinking outside the traditional capitalist box (which sees resources as scarce) and moving towards the idea that a new understanding of the problem (its interpretation) is what creates new resources, Fartookzadeh *et al*. (2024). [13] Such a lab would help achieve the ultimate goal of interpretation, which not only creates a theoretical understanding, but "action in the world" or "creating impact," which is what the Inspiration Economy strives for. Buheji (2024) [7].

Inspiration labs apply hermeneutics (perhaps intuitively or intentionally) where solutions are not imported from outside, but are "extracted" from within the problem itself and from within the targeted community. The lab is used hermeneutically as a methodology for:

1. Deconstructing the closed "text" of the problem.
2. Dialoguing with its givens.
3. Producing a new meaning that is the innovative solution.

This process transforms the individual from a passive recipient of solutions (as in a rentier economy, for example) into an active and effective "interpreter" in their world, capable of seeing what is invisible at first glance. This is the mindset of the "Inspiration Economy," which seeks to achieve "exploration," "resilience," and "creating impact."

4.5. Hermeneutics as a Mechanism for Creating Perception and Cognition

"The creation of perception" is the direct outcome and the ultimate goal of the hermeneutic circle when applied in Inspiration Labs. The mechanisms of this contribution is as follows:

4.5.1. Deconstructing "Ready-Made Perception" and Restarting the Circle

Before we can create a new perception, we must realise the limits of our current perception. Complex problems defy solution because we see them with a limited perception. Hermeneutics, as applied by Inspiration Labs, takes the first step in creating perception through:

Suspending Certainties: In Inspiration Labs, preconceptions and ready-made solutions are suspended. This is akin to temporarily "suspending" the reader's horizon to become capable of seeing the horizon of the text (the problem) more purely. This suspension creates a necessary void for the birth of a new perception.

Making the Familiar Strange: Through the in-depth "observation" phase, stable mental models are deconstructed. Small details that were once neglected suddenly become meaningful. This "alienation" from conventional understanding is the beginning of creating a different perception.

4.5.2. Integrating Parts and Whole: Building a Network of Relationships

Perception is not merely collecting information, but understanding the relationships between things. The hermeneutic circle contributes to creating perception through:

Pattern Recognition: When the team begins to link the "parts" (scattered observations) with the "whole" (the higher value or the bigger picture), they not only understand the problem, but they begin to see patterns that were hidden. A new perception is seeing these patterns for the first time.

Generating Contextual Meaning: Hermeneutics emphasises that meaning does not exist in a vacuum, but in context. Inspiration Labs "create" a new perception because they re-contextualise the problem within its real context (the whole), instead of isolating it in a dry theoretical model. Perception here is "understanding the role" the problem plays in the larger system.

4.5.3. Fusion of Horizons: The Birth of Collective Perception

This is the most creative mechanism in creating perception. According to Gadamer, understanding occurs in the "in-between space" between the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the text. In Inspiration Labs:

Multiplicity of Horizons: The lab includes people from different backgrounds and specializations (economists, sociologists, artists, engineers). Each represents a different cognitive "horizon."

Dialogue, Not Debate: The discussion is not to prove who is right, but to create a space where these horizons meet. When the horizon of the economist merges with the horizon of the artist and the horizon of the problem-owner themselves, what might be called an "interpretive explosion" occurs, producing a new perception that would not have been possible for any of them alone. This new perception is the "offspring" of this meeting, not the "child" of any single party.

4.5.4. Reverse Thinking: Perceiving the Future in the Present

Reverse thinking (assuming the existence of the solution and then working backwards) is a practical application of the principle that understanding is a project, not merely retrieval. This contributes to creating perception through:

Transforming the Possible into Reality in the Mind: When the team imagines the solution as if it exists, they begin to see possibilities and resources in the current reality that were hidden. They "perceive" the present through the lens of the future.

Breaking Linear Causality: Traditional perception views the problem as a cause that must be followed by a solution. Reverse thinking creates a circular (cyclical) perception where the future (the hypothesised solution) influences our understanding of the present (the problem). This is an inversion of traditional temporal perception, and it is hermeneutical par excellence.

4.5.5. The Result: Creating "Inspired Perception"

The creation of perception in Inspiration Labs is a process of "systematic collective interpretation" that begins by deconstructing old perception (suspending judgments), then passes through a stage of building a new network of relationships between the parts of the problem and its whole (the hermeneutic circle), and culminates in the meeting of different horizons (fusion of horizons) to give birth to a new understanding of the world that is, in itself, the solution.

All these mechanisms ultimately lead to what can be called the "Aha! moment" or the moment of inspiration. This moment is the culmination of a complex interpretive process. It is not a coincidence, but rather:

Second-Order Perception: i.e., a perception that is aware of itself and aware of how it was formed. The team not only knows the solution but also knows how they arrived at this understanding, enabling them to replicate the process.

Transferable Perception: Because it resulted from the fusion of multiple horizons, it carries within it a common language that enables it to be translated into a practical "impact" on the ground.

5. Use of Hermeneutics in Inspiration Economy Complex Problems Solving

Hermeneutics (the theory and methodology of interpretation) is not merely an auxiliary analytical tool within the Inspiration Economy; rather, it constitutes a foundational epistemological approach for understanding, analysing, and synthesizing complex socio-economic problems. The Inspiration Economy adopts hermeneutic thinking to move beyond surface-level diagnosis toward deeper meaning-making, enabling the transformation of challenges into opportunities for value creation.

5.1. Problematization as Textual Interpretation

Within the Inspiration Economy framework, problems are treated not as isolated technical failures but as living texts embedded in human, social, and cultural contexts. This perspective shifts the analysis from quantitative symptoms to qualitative meanings. Hermeneutic inquiry in this context asks about ‘what implicit meanings does the phenomenon convey about human behaviour?’, ‘which unspoken values or assumptions shape the problem?’, ‘what is absent or silenced in dominant narratives surrounding the issue?’. For example, unemployment is not interpreted solely as a labour-market imbalance, but as a possible crisis of meaning, identity, or misalignment between education systems and lived societal realities. Lincoln and Guba (1985). [19]

5.2. The Hermeneutic Circle in Systemic Analysis in Inspiration Labs

Reviewing Inspiration Labs done since 2015, one can clearly appreciate the way it applies a type of hermeneutic circle, whereby understanding emerges through a continuous movement between parts and the whole. Individual cases, narratives, or micro-observations are interpreted in light of broader systemic, cultural, community or institutional contexts—and vice versa. This iterative process prevents reductionist or mechanistic solutions, avoids uncritical replication of external models, and encourages context-sensitive and emergent understanding.

5.3. Deconstruction of Pre-Understandings in Inspiration Labs

Hermeneutic philosophy, particularly as articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), emphasizes that interpretation is never neutral; it is always shaped by prior assumptions (pre-understandings). [14] Accordingly, the Inspiration Economy explicitly seeks to surface hidden assumptions embedded in the problem, or the practices, or the culture, or the policies, question dominant definitions such as success, productivity, or efficiency, etc. and then reframe what is commonly accepted as “the problem”. This approach aligns with Inspiration Lab tools such as differential diagnosis, model inversion, and the identification of “black spots” (blind areas in conventional analysis).

5.4. Interpretation Oriented Toward Action

Unlike purely descriptive or theoretical hermeneutics, the Inspiration Lab emphasizes interpretation for action. Understanding is not an end in itself, but a means for generating new forms of socio-economic value.

This principle resonates with the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, who argued that genuine understanding culminates in new possibilities for action. Within the Inspiration Economy, solutions are therefore conceived not as static conclusions, but as inspirational practices, prototypes, or behaviours that can be tested, adapted, and scaled. Zwier (2015). [27]

5.5. Hermeneutics in the Synthesis of Solutions

In the synthesis phase, hermeneutics enables the reconstruction of meaning rather than the mere aggregation of data. In Inspiration Lab both the problem and the role of the human actor within it are redefined. For instance, retirees are not framed as economic dependents but as repositories of unarticulated experiential knowledge wealth. Consequently, solutions are not limited to employment creation, but may involve designing new roles, platforms for purpose, or experience-based economic models.

5.6. Analysis of the Depth of Generalising a Problem-Solving in Inspiration Lab Using Hermeneutics

Linden and Cybulski (2006) demonstrated how hermeneutics—traditionally a method for interpreting texts—can be applied to analyse and refine dynamic real-world processes. Specifically, the authors used hermeneutic principles to study the process of "pattern mining" (eliciting problem-solving experience from multimedia developers and recording it as design patterns). [20] Linden and Cybulski focused on three specific hermeneutic features to study the process: the context in which knowledge and experience are generated, then use the hermeneutic circle to develop an emergent understanding of information sources, and finally deal with the preconceptions of what is being studied. By "re-casting" the dynamic development process as a "text analogue" that could be interpreted, Linden and Cybulski were able to elucidate the well-known "pattern mining" process to refine and improve the process for eliciting and sharing problem-solving experience across a domain.

This approach of Linden and Cybulski (2006) serves as a precedent for applying hermeneutic methods outside of classical text interpretation. It shows that hermeneutics can be used to understand how tacit, individual problem-solving experience can be externalized and made shareable. The approach also improves practical methodologies (like the

"Inspiration Labs") through iterative interpretation and revision. Buheji (2026a) [9].

Figure (3) illustrates how specific insights from Inspiration Labs are transformed into transferable inspiration currencies through a structured four-stage architecture. 'Stage 1: Specific Engagement' involves full interpretive encounter with a particular problem using hermeneutic tools (hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons), yielding deep understanding of the problem's unique configuration. 'Stage 2: Extraction' applies codification to problem constructs, identifying elements with potential for transfer across contexts.

Then, we go through 'Stage 3: Abstraction' employs classification to recognize patterns and structural similarities, moving from the specific to the general while maintaining interpretive depth. Finally, 'Stage 4: Recontextualization' uses stratification and reverse thinking to adapt insights to new situations, honouring each context's unique features while applying transferred understanding.

The outcome is an Inspiration Currency—a principle, insight, or value extracted through deep interpretation that can be adapted and applied elsewhere. This architecture embodies the paper's distinction between positivist generalization (mechanical application of universal solutions) and hermeneutic generalization (creative transfer of understanding across diverse contexts while remaining attentive to local particularity).

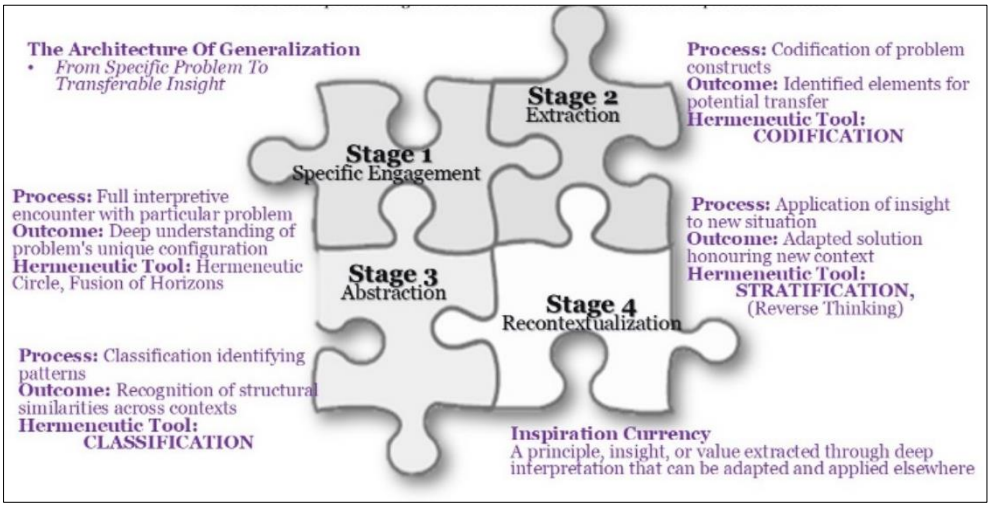

Fig 3: Framework of Generalization Architecture which shows how specific insights are transformed into transferable inspiration currencies

5.7. Hermeneutics and the Cognitive Thinking Needed in Inspiration Lab

Shaun Gallagher (2004) influential paper, "Hermeneutics and the Cognitive Sciences" helped to bridge interpretive theory with practical, evidence-based fields as Inspiration Labs. Gallagher (2004) [16] argued that hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation) and the cognitive sciences are not opposing disciplines but are deeply complementary. He linked between "understanding" in the human sciences and "explanation" in the natural sciences and seen that both fields can work together to provide a fuller account of consciousness, cognition, and human behaviour. The paper demonstrates three key points: (1) the fields are not in opposition, (2) hermeneutics has much to contribute to cognitive science, and (3) cognitive science has much to contribute to hermeneutics.

Gallagher seen that Understanding follows a hermeneutic circle structure. To understand a "part" (an object), we must relate it to the "whole" (its context, prior knowledge). Conversely, our understanding of the whole is revised based on new parts. This aligns with Cognitive schemas (organized patterns of knowledge) which allow us to "assimilate" new information. When new information doesn't fit, schemas "accommodate" or change. Both fields, i.e. human and natural science, describe the same fundamental process of learning. We understand new things by fitting them into existing frameworks, which are then revised as needed.

5.8. Role of Hermeneutics in Absorbing and Realising a Novel Situation

Gallagher emphasizes the role of imagination through what he called "innovative or productive hermeneutics". Faced with a novel situation, we don't just apply a fixed rule, instead, we must improvise, metaphorically extending our understanding. This aligns with Kant's concept of "determinant judgment" (applying a universal to a particular) versus "reflective judgment" (finding a universal for a given particular). This ability to be flexible and imaginative in new situations is a crucial contribution hermeneutics can make to understanding situated cognition during the exploration phase of the Inspiration Lab. Buheji and Ahmed (2018). [11]

Gadamer (1989) [15] argues that social sciences cannot simply imitate the methods of natural sciences. This echoes the central thesis of Truth and Method—that there is no method that guarantees truth in human understanding. He states understanding in social life is not a technical problem to be solved by applying correct procedures, but a dialogical process that always involves the interpreter's own historicity and prejudices.

Gadamer reaffirms that prejudices (pre-judgments) are not obstacles to understanding but its very condition. In the modern scientific context, prejudice is typically seen as the opposite of sound judgment. Since human understanding occurs as dialogue, for social science, this implies that researchers cannot stand outside society and observe it

objectively. They are always already participants in the social world they study. The relationship between researcher and researched require a genuine understanding with openness to the other's claim. This aligns with the hermeneutical insight that understanding always involves application—we understand a situation by understanding how to act within it.
Paul Kidder (1997) [18] argues that two traditional philosophical notions—hermeneutic and dialectic—have profound implications for contemporary theory and practice in social and economic development. He contends that before one can understand another culture or community, one must first become aware of one's own assumptions and prejudices. Kidder emphasizes that "the appropriation of one's own horizon of assumptions is essential to the task of listening to and interpreting unfamiliar cultural horizons".
Hermeneutic understanding does not stop at comprehension; it seeks to find "resources for criticism and reform within that understood universe of cultural meaning". This means that the values, traditions, and meanings already present in a community are not obstacles to development but potential resources for it.
Kidder directly connects hermeneutics to economic development as he explicitly applies Gadamerian concepts to the field of development—exactly the domain of Inspiration Economy Labs. The insistence on grasping cultural meaning "from within" aligns perfectly with the Inspiration Economy methodology of field exploration and observation before imposing solutions. It legitimizes collaborative problem-solving through Kidder's dialectic model—where participants risk their opinions through mutual inquiry—mirrors the Inspiration Lab process where diverse stakeholders (economists, sociologists, artists, community members) meet to generate new solutions. Buheji (2024) [7].

6. Use of Hermeneutics in Islamic Literature and Qur'anic Teaching

In Islamic tradition, two classical terms have long governed the interpretation of the Qur'an:

6.1. Tafsīr (تفسير) which refers to exegesis or explanation of the Qur'anic text, focusing on its external meaning (ẓāhir). It is guided by linguistic analysis (dalālah luġawiyah) and tends toward objectivity, relying on established methodologies including (interpretation based on tradition/history) and (interpretation based on rational thought). Classical works such as Tafsir al-Tabari and Tafsir Ibn Kathir exemplify this approach, emphasizing the authority of tradition and literal understanding of the text.

6.2. Ta'wīl (تأويل) which derives from the root meaning "to return" or "to revert." It seeks the inner, esoteric meaning of the text—the "deepest meaning" that connects to spiritual dimensions. Ta'wīl prioritises subjective insight based on intuitive and rational approaches, attempting to find the second meaning beyond the literal. As Syed Farid al-Attas (1980) illustrates, when the verse "He brings life from death" is understood as God giving life to birds from eggs, that is tafsīr; but when understood as "God prioritises believers over polytheists or prioritises the knowledgeable over the ignorant," that is ta'wīl because it contains deep meaning.

6.3. The Hermeneutic Debate Among Muslim Scholars

Hermeneutics is a Western philosophical term dating to the seventeenth century. It refers to the theory of interpretation concerned with the nature of texts, what it means to understand a text, and how understanding is shaped by the presuppositions and assumptions (the horizon) of both interpreter and audience. It prioritises intersubjectivity using historical, sociological, and psychological approaches, engaging the triad of text, author, and reader.

Table 4: Illsutrates How Contemporary Muslim scholarship presents three main positions regarding the application of hermeneutics to the Qur'an

Position	View	Key Concerns
Complete Rejection	Hermeneutics is a Western product from Christian theology and Greek mythology, incompatible with Islamic principles	Emphasises text sanctity, absolute authority, and divine revelation; views hermeneutics as contrary to Ulumul Qur'an methodology
Complete Acceptance	Hermeneutics offers valuable tools for contextual understanding	Adopted by contemporary thinkers to address modern challenges
Conditional Acceptance	Hermeneutics can be useful within certain boundaries, as a complement to—not replacement for—traditional methods	Must be grounded in Islamic scholarship and used within the framework of ta'wīl rather than as primary method

7. How Inspiration Labs Operationalise Hermeneutic Principles?

7.1. Introduction to Operationalising Hemeneutic Principles in Inspiration Labs

Inspiration Labs operationalize hermeneutic through the processes of codification, classification, and stratification which are mechanisms through which hermeneutic interpretation moves from abstract philosophy to practical methodology, Yin (2014). [26] Based on the published theory of inspiration economy and inspiration labs, direct references to "hermeneutics" that can be linked to Inspiration Economy literature are not present in these specific sources, but the conceptual alignment is clear.

In hermeneutic philosophy, understanding begins by approaching a text as containing layered meanings that must be uncovered through disciplined interpretation. Inspiration Labs extend this principle to socio-economic problems, treating them not as obstacles to be eliminated but as complex "texts" requiring systematic interpretation before solutions can emerge.
As Buheji and Ahmed (2019) establishes that each problem has its opportunities that can be exploited directly or through its constructs and codes that differentiate it from other problems. [12] Thus, each problem has its structure, specificity and complexity. This recognition that problems possess internal structure their own grammar, syntax, and

meaning is the hermeneutic starting point. Just as a text must be analysed at multiple levels (word, sentence, paragraph, chapter, whole), a problem must be analysed through its constituent elements before genuine understanding can occur.

The full hermeneutic cycle in Inspiration Labs can be mapped in three phases from 'Deconstruction to Reconstruction', as follows:

Phase 1: Deconstruction (Breaking Down)

1. **Visualization:** Approaching the problem as a meaningful whole
2. **Codification:** Extracting the problem's fundamental constructs
3. **Classification:** Organising codes into meaningful categories
4. **Stratification:** Penetrating surface to reach deeper layers

Phase 2: Interpretation (Making Meaning)

1. **Pattern recognition:** Identifying relationships across layers
2. **Contextual understanding:** Placing the problem within its larger system
3. **Dialogue:** Multiple perspectives engaging with the interpreted problem
4. **Insight generation:** The "aha moment" where deep meaning emerges

Phase 3: Reconstruction (Creating Solutions)

1. **Opportunity identification:** Seeing the solution embedded within the problem
2. **Reverse thinking:** Working backwards from the imagined solution
3. **Model creation:** Building replicable approaches from single insights
4. **Impact generation:** Translating understanding into action

Table 5: illustrates the codification-classification-stratification approach and how it embodies core hermeneutic principles

Hermeneutic Principle	How does Inspiration Labs Operationalize It?
The hermeneutic circle	Moving between parts (codes) and the whole (the problem system) iteratively to deepen understanding
Fusion of horizons	Multiple disciplinary perspectives (economic, social, technical, and local) engage with the classified and stratified problem to generate new meaning
Pre-understanding	Recognising that "mental blocks are a collection of attitudes that prevent us from thinking something different"; addressing these through systematic stratification
Application	Understanding is not complete until it produces a solution—an "inspiration currency" that creates "better social and economic results"
Dialogue	The lab setting creates a dialogical space where classified and stratified problem elements are discussed across perspectives

Figure (4) outlines the three-phase methodological journey through which Inspiration Labs translate hermeneutic principles into practice. Phase 1 is focused on 'Deconstruction' which begins with visualization of the problem as a meaningful whole, followed by codification (extracting fundamental constructs), classification (organizing these constructs into coherent categories), and stratification (penetrating surface layers to reach deeper meaning). Then Phase 2 is focused on 'Interpretation' that focus on (making meaning) which involves pattern recognition across the stratified layers, contextual understanding that situates the problem within its larger system, dialogue among diverse stakeholders, and ultimately insight generation—the "Aha! moment" where deep meaning emerges Yin (2014) [26].

Last, we have Phase 3 which focus on 'Reconstruction' (creating solutions) that transforms insight into action through opportunity identification, reverse thinking (working backward from an imagined solution), model creation (building replicable approaches), and impact generation (translating understanding into tangible outcomes).

Throughout all phases, the hermeneutic circle operates iteratively, ensuring continuous movement between phases as understanding deepens.

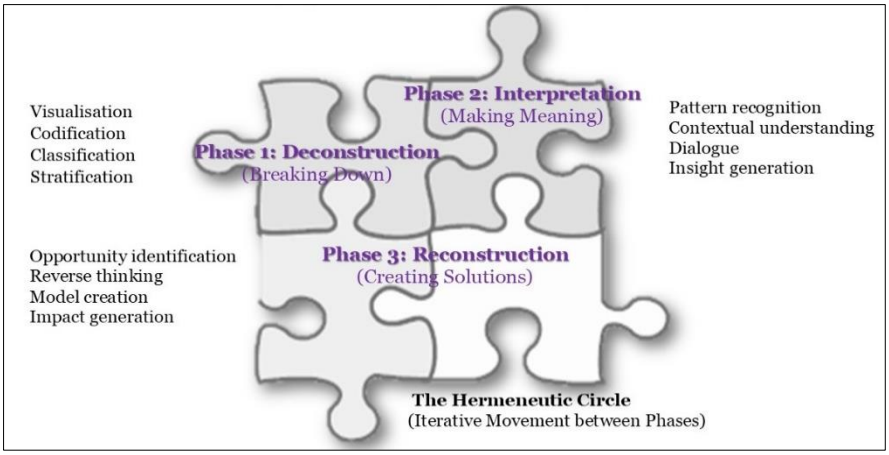

Fig 4: Shows Methodological Processes (Inspiration Lab Operationalisation) and Hermeneutic Circle (Iterative Movement between Phases)

7.2. Role of Codification in Extracting the Problem's Grammar

Codification in Inspiration Labs corresponds to the hermeneutic act of identifying and extracting the fundamental units of meaning from the problem "text." As Buheji explains, "During inspiration Lab after visualizing the problem we start dividing it into constructs". This division into constructs is essentially a process of codification—breaking down the complex problem into discrete, analysable components that can be examined individually.

Table 6: illustrates how Codification Process serves multiple hermeneutic functions

Codification Function	Hermeneutic Equivalent	Purpose
Identifying constructs	Isolating textual units	Breaking complexity into manageable elements
Recognizing patterns	Finding textual coherence	Discovering how elements relate |
Extracting codes	Uncovering deep structure	Revealing underlying logic of the problem

The goal of codification is not simplification but clarification of complexity. By identifying the "codes" embedded within the problem, the lab team gains access to the problem's internal logic—its "anatomy" as Buheji terms it.

The analysis reveals deep isomorphism between textual interpretation and problem interpretation. Just as a reader encounters a text as a meaningful whole and must discern its constituent elements (words, sentences, paragraphs) to grasp its meaning, lab participants encounter a problem as a meaningful phenomenon and must identify its constituent constructs to understand its structure. Just as a reader must relate parts to the whole iteratively to deepen comprehension, lab participants must move between specific observations and broader context to generate insight. Just as a reader must penetrate surface meaning to reach deeper significance, lab participants must stratify through layers—observational, structural, generative, opportunity—to uncover hidden potentials.

Figure (5) details the three core methodological processes—Codification, Classification, and Stratification—that constitute the pillars of hermeneutic problem-solving in Inspiration Labs. The Codification (C1) process corresponds to "extracting the grammar" of the problem, identifying textual units through activities such as dividing problems into constructs, extracting fundamental units, and identifying patterns. Its hermeneutic function is identifying basic textual elements, yielding "problem codes" ready for analysis. While the Classification (C2) process involves "organizing the framework," finding textual coherence through grouping related codes, building typologies, and distinguishing essential from peripheral elements. Its hermeneutic function is recognizing relationships and establishing coherence, producing an interpretive framework for meaning-making.

Figure (5) also shows the Stratification (S) process which represents "penetrating the depth," reaching deep meaning by moving through successive layers—from surface symptoms to underlying patterns to root causes to hidden opportunities. Its hermeneutic function is discovering the non-obvious, culminating in "inspiration currency"—transferable insight extracted through sustained interpretive effort. Together, these three processes operationalize the hermeneutic circle, transforming abstract philosophy into practical methodology.

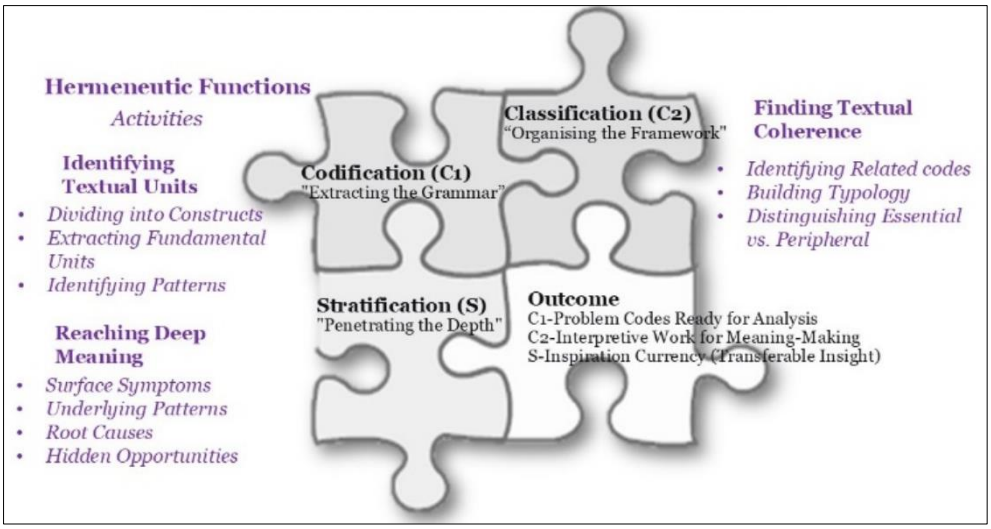

Fig 5: Framework of The Triadic Process of Hermeneutic Interpretation (Three Pillars of Hermeneutic Problem-Solving in Inspiration Labs)

7.3. Role of Classification in Building Interpretive Frameworks

Once codes are extracted, classification organises them into meaningful categories. This corresponds to the hermeneutic movement from isolated elements toward understanding their relationships. The search results emphasise that "each problem engages different cognitive process that needs different data collection and synthesis approach" —and classification is the synthesis mechanism.

Classification enables the lab to group related codes into thematic clusters, distinguish essential from peripheral elements, identify relationships between different problem dimensions, build typologies of similar problems across contexts. This classificatory work is deeply hermeneutic because it reflects the interpreter's active role in organizing meaning. As Buheji notes when external event happens, we choose to see only one side of the story, and then interpret the solution around it. Classification makes this interpretive

choice explicit and systematic.

7.4. Role of Stratification in Uncovering Layered Meaning

Stratification represents the deepest hermeneutic engagement—recognising that problems, like texts, contain multiple layers of meaning that must be penetrated sequentially. The search results indicate that Inspiration Labs aim to "find the blind spots that we couldn't see clearly", moving from surface observation to deeper absorption.

Table 7: Illustrates how the stratification proceeds through distinct layers:

Layer	Focus	Question
Observational	Visible symptoms	What is happening?
Structural	Underlying patterns	Why is it happening?
Generative	Root causes	What produces these patterns?
Opportunity	Hidden potentials	What possibilities are embedded here?

The ultimate goal of stratification is reaching what Buheji calls "the opportunity deep inside the problem"—an "inspiration currency" that "might not be realised at first instance". This is precisely the hermeneutic goal of reaching the text's deeper, non-obvious meaning through sustained interpretive effort.

Figure (6) provides a detailed visualization of the stratification process—the deepest hermeneutic engagement in Inspiration Labs. Problems are understood as containing multiple layers of meaning that must be penetrated sequentially. The first layer, 'Layer 1: Observational' addresses the question "What is happening?" focusing on visible symptoms and immediate phenomena—the initial encounter with the problem "text." Then, 'Layer 2: Structural' asks "Why is it happening?" examining underlying patterns and relationships between elements—identifying how parts connect to form the problem's architecture.

After Layer 2 we see 'Layer 3: Generative'. In Figure (6) probes "What produces these patterns?" investigating root causes, systemic drivers, and deep structures—understanding what generates the observed phenomena. Then, last we have 'Layer 4: Opportunity' poses "What possibilities are embedded here?" focusing on hidden potentials and unarticulated value—discovering meaning not immediately apparent. The slide emphasizes that layers may be endless, but the ultimate goal is reaching what Buheji (2017) calls "the opportunity deep inside the problem that might not be realized at first instance"—the inspiration currency. This stratification process ensures that labs move beyond surface symptoms to genuine transformative insight.

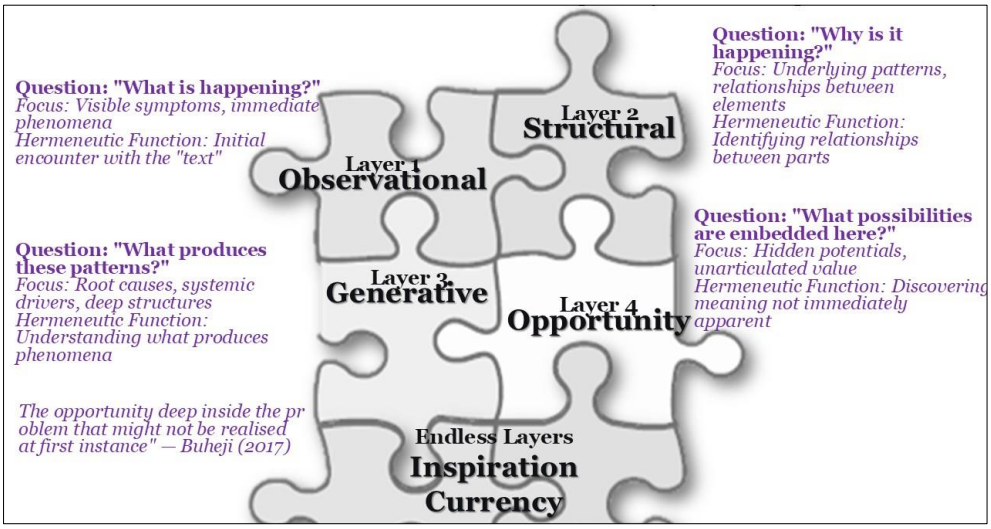

Fig 6: Show the Framework of Stratification: Penetrating the Layers of Meaning

The ultimate hermeneutic achievement in Inspiration Labs is the transformation of the problem itself. Buheji states this explicitly: "The purpose of this whole process is not to solve the problem, but rather to use it build from it an insight, one that can lead to human or community advancement." The problem becomes not an obstacle but a source of discovery—a text whose deep meaning, once uncovered, reveals opportunities invisible at first glance.

Once we reach stratification, after passing through codification, and classification, a disciplined interpretive framework that prevents premature solution-jumping and ensures genuine engagement with the problem's depth is created. As Buheji notes, insights or development solutions might not appear till the all the data are gathered, analysed and deeply interpolated. These three processes constitute deep interpolation.

Table 8: Give a Summary of How Codification, Classification, and Stratification work together as a Hermeneutic Practice

Process	Activity	Hermeneutic Function	Outcome
Codification	Dividing the problem into constructs, extracting fundamental units	Identifying basic textual elements	Problem "codes" ready for analysis
Classification	Organising codes into thematic categories; building typologies	Recognising relationships; establishing coherence	Interpretive framework for meaning-making
Stratification	Penetrating surface layers; uncovering root causes and hidden potentials	Reaching deep meaning; discovering the non-obvious	"Inspiration currency"—the solution embedded within the problem

This framework demonstrates how Inspiration Labs transform hermeneutic principles from philosophy into practice—using disciplined interpretation to find, as Buheji describes, "the opportunities developed in the chapters" that show "how much we humans can change positively the fate of humanity".

8. Discussion and Conclusion

8.1. Synthesis of the Inquiry

This study set out to investigate a question at once philosophical and practical: How are hermeneutic principles operationalised within Inspiration Labs to enable deep problem-solving and solution generalisation? The inquiry was motivated by a recognition that Inspiration Economy practices, despite their documented impact across more than twenty countries and diverse problem domains, had not been systematically examined through the lens of interpretive philosophy. Conversely, hermeneutic theory—with its rich conceptual resources for understanding how meaning emerges, how perspectives merge, and how understanding translates into action—had rarely been extended to the domain of socio-economic problem-solving. Lincoln and Guba (1985). [19]

The journey of this research has traversed multiple territories: the history of hermeneutic philosophy from its origins in Greek mythology through its development by Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricœur; the emergence and evolution of Inspiration Economy as a distinctive paradigm for development; the methodology of Inspiration Labs as documented in hundreds of projects across six continents; and the detailed analysis of how specific lab processes—codification, classification, stratification—embody hermeneutic principles.

What emerges from this inquiry is a coherent picture: Inspiration Labs are not merely problem-solving methodologies but interpretive practices. They treat socio-economic problems as meaningful texts requiring disciplined interpretation. They operationalise the hermeneutic circle through iterative movement between problem parts and the whole context. They facilitate the fusion of horizons through dialogical engagement among diverse stakeholders. They surface and suspend pre-understandings through techniques that make the familiar strange. They transform understanding into action through the generation of "inspiration currencies"—transferable insights that carry meaning across contexts.

8.2. Achievement of Research Objectives

This study pursued and achieved the following objectives:

1. Explicated the hermeneutic foundations implicit in Inspiration Lab methodology, making visible the interpretive principles that have guided practice.
2. Analysed how specific lab processes—codification, classification, stratification—operationalise hermeneutic concepts.
3. Demonstrated how the hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons, and attention to pre-understanding function in actual lab settings across diverse contexts.
4. Developed a theoretical framework for understanding how generalisation occurs through depth interpretation in Inspiration Labs.
5. Contributed to both hermeneutic theory (by extending its application to problem-solving) and Inspiration Economy literature (by providing philosophical grounding).

8.3. Basis of Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as articulated in Truth and Method (Gadamer, 1975/1989) and developed in subsequent works (Gadamer, 1975).

Table 9: Shows the three core concepts through a theoretical lens

Concept	Definition	Application to Inspiration Labs
The Hermeneutic Circle	The iterative movement between parts and whole through which understanding emerges	Understanding problems through continuous movement between specific observations (parts) and broader context (whole)
Fusion of Horizons	The dialogical encounter between interpreter's horizon and text's horizon that generates new meaning	Collective meaning-making when diverse stakeholders engage with the problem from their perspectives
Pre-understanding	The assumptions and prejudices that shape what we can see and understand	Surfacing and suspending mental blocks that limit perception of the problem and possibilities

This framework is supplemented by insights from Gallagher (2004) on the complementarity of hermeneutics and cognitive sciences, illuminating how interpretive processes relate to cognition and learning in lab settings. Besides, this framework focuses on hermeneutics and community development, demonstrating the relevance of interpretive approaches to development practice, Kidder (1997). Also, the framework complements with Linden and Cybulski (2006) on applying hermeneutics to pattern mining, providing methodological precedent for extending hermeneutics to problem-solving.

8.4. Employment of Hermeneutics as a Methodological Lens to Inspiration Economy

Inspiration Economy and its labs managed to employ hermeneutics as a methodological lens to:

1. Engage constructively with complexity rather than oversimplifying it.
2. Interpret socio-economic realities through human-centred meaning.
3. Transform systemic challenges into opportunities for inspiration-driven value creation.

By integrating hermeneutic interpretation with action-oriented design, the Inspiration Economy advances a distinctive approach to understanding and addressing complex problems in contemporary societies.

8.5. Implication and Contribution of this Paper

The research on hermeneutics and the inspiration economy has the following implications. It legitimises the "fusion", just as Gallagher argues for a collaboration between interpretive and scientific approaches, the work in this paper demonstrates how Inspiration Economy Labs fuse interpretive dialogue (understanding problems) with practical, evidence-based methodologies (creating solutions). It provides a model for multi-level analysis: The "depth hermeneutics" framework offers a way to structure your argument—showing how the Inspiration Economy operates both at the level of subjective, collective meaning-making and at the level of generating tangible, measurable socioeconomic outcomes. The discussion of embodied simulation and situated cognition supports the Inspiration Economy's focus on field exploration and observation. Understanding a problem is not an abstract, intellectual act; it is an engaged, experiential process of being in the world.

This research shows that understanding others involves a complex interplay of embodied practices and interpretive acts that directly parallels the process in Inspiration Labs, where diverse stakeholders ("horizons") merge to create new, shared solutions to complex problems.

All the published work on Inspiration Labs and its methodology did not explicitly use the term "hermeneutics". This work brings in a significant research opportunity for your work. The conceptual alignment is clear, but the explicit theoretical linkage between hermeneutic philosophy and Inspiration Lab methodology appears to be an underexplored area. Therefore, this paper serves as a powerful theoretical precedent that the hermeneutical process is not just about interpreting texts, but is fundamental to how we solve complex problems and generate new knowledge in the world. This research makes several original contributions in relevance to theory, practice, and methodology.

8.5.1. Contribution to Hermeneutic and Inspiration Economy Theory

This paper provides the first systematic explication of the hermeneutic foundations underlying the Inspiration Economy. It extends hermeneutic theory beyond traditional domains (texts, art, law) to socio-economic problem-solving. The paper also develops a framework for understanding generalisation through depth interpretation.

This research makes several original contributions to theory and Hermeneutic Philosophy.

1. **Extension to new domain:** This study extends hermeneutic inquiry beyond its traditional domains—texts, art, law, history—to socio-economic problem-solving, demonstrating the continued relevance and applicability of interpretive philosophy to contemporary challenges.
2. **Elaboration of interpretive processes:** By analyzing how codification, classification, and stratification function in practice, the research provides a concrete specification of how hermeneutic interpretation actually proceeds—a level of detail often absent from purely philosophical treatments.
3. **Integration of multiple traditions:** The study brings Gadamerian hermeneutics into dialogue with Islamic interpretive traditions (tafsir and ta'wil), suggesting possibilities for cross-cultural philosophical exchange.
4. **Connection to innovation:** By linking hermeneutics to the generation of "inspiration currencies," the research opens new territory for understanding how interpretation relates to creativity, innovation, and value creation.

8.5.2. Contribution to Inspiration Economy Literature

1. **Explication of philosophical foundations:** This study provides the first systematic articulation of the interpretive principles underlying Inspiration Lab methodology, making explicit what has been implicit in practice.
2. **Deepening of conceptual framework:** By linking core Inspiration Economy concepts—problem visualisation, construct division, blind spot identification, reverse thinking, inspiration currencies—to hermeneutic theory, the research deepens understanding of why these practices work.
3. **Enhancement of methodological rigour:** The articulation of hermeneutic foundations strengthens the theoretical grounding of Inspiration Labs, enhancing their credibility and enabling more intentional application.
4. **Bridging to broader scholarly conversation:** By connecting Inspiration Economy to established philosophical traditions, the research facilitates dialogue with scholars in hermeneutics, phenomenology, and interpretive social science.

8.5.3. Contribution to Problem-Solving Theory

1. **Hermeneutic model of generalisation:** The study offers a framework for understanding how generalisation occurs through depth interpretation—an alternative to both positivist generalisation (universal laws) and particularist rejection of generalisation (radical contextualism).
2. **Integration of interpretation and action:** By demonstrating how understanding culminates in inspiration currencies and practical solutions, the research contributes to the theory of practice—how knowing and doing are united in interpretive engagement.
3. **Attention to pre-understanding:** The study highlights the critical role of surfacing and suspending assumptions in effective problem-solving, contributing to metacognitive understanding of problem-solving processes.

8.5.4. Contribution to Practice

This study offers practitioners an explicit understanding of why Inspiration Lab methods work, enabling more intentional application. It provides tools for surfacing and addressing pre-understandings that limit problem perception.

The outcome illuminates how to cultivate the "fusion of horizons" in diverse stakeholder groups, and clarifies how to generate and recognise "inspiration currencies" as transferable insights.

8.5.5. Contribution to Methodology

The paper demonstrates the application of hermeneutic phenomenology to the study of development practice. It develops a multi-case study approach sensitive to interpretive dimensions of problem-solving. It provides a replicable framework for analysing interpretive processes in innovation settings.

8.5.6. Practical Implications

8.5.6.1. For Inspiration Lab Practitioners

1. **Intentional hermeneutic awareness:** Practitioners can benefit from explicit understanding that they are engaged in interpretive work, enabling more deliberate attention to the hermeneutic dimensions of lab processes.
2. **Cultivation of dialogical space:** Recognition that the fusion of horizons requires genuine dialogue—not debate—can guide facilitators in creating conditions for collective meaning-making.
3. **Systematic attention to pre-understanding:** Explicit techniques for surfacing and suspending mental blocks can be integrated into lab design, enhancing participants' capacity to see beyond conventional perception.
4. **Conscious development of inspiration currencies:** Understanding that generalisation occurs through the extraction of transferable insight can guide practitioners in identifying and codifying the deep learning from each lab.

8.5.6.2. For Development Organisations

1. **Beyond technical solutions:** The hermeneutic perspective reinforces that complex development problems require interpretive engagement, not just technical interventions—challenging over-reliance on imported models.
2. **Valuing local meaning:** Recognition that understanding must emerge from within local horizons supports participatory approaches and community ownership.
3. **Investing in interpretive capacity:** Development organisations might invest in cultivating interpretive competencies—the capacity to read situations, surface assumptions, and facilitate dialogical meaning-making.

8.5.6.3. For Educators and Trainers

1. **Teaching interpretation as a core competency:** Problem-solving education might incorporate hermeneutic concepts, teaching students to approach problems as texts requiring interpretation.
2. **Cultivating reflexivity:** Training programs can develop participants' capacity to recognise their own pre-understandings and how these shape problem perceptions.
3. **Practising the hermeneutic circle:** Exercises that move iteratively between parts and whole can build interpretive muscle.

8.6. The Hermeneutic Circle Manifest in Inspiration Labs

The hermeneutic circle operates at multiple levels in lab practice. At the micro-level, it functions in the iterative movement between problem visualisation and construct division. At the meso-level, it operates in the dialectic between specific observations and the "bigger picture" or "higher value." At the macro-level, it structures the entire lab process—from initial problem engagement through deep interpretation to solution generation and reflection. In each case, understanding emerges not through linear progression but through circular return—each iteration deepening and refining what can be seen.

8.7. The Fusion of Horizons Occurs in Lab Settings

The fusion of horizons manifests when diverse stakeholders—economists, sociologists, artists, engineers, community members, problem-owners—engage in genuine dialogue within the lab space. This is not a debate aimed at winning arguments but a dialogical encounter aimed at mutual understanding and collective meaning-making. When the horizon of the expert merges with the horizon of the artist and the horizon of the community member, what this paper has termed an "interpretive explosion" occurs—the emergence of new meaning that would not have been possible for any participant alone. This new meaning is the offspring of the encounter, belonging to no single party but available to all.

8.8. The Pre-understandings Surfaced, Suspended, and Transformed in Inspiration Lab

Inspiration Labs addresses pre-understandings through multiple mechanisms. The deliberate phase of observation makes the familiar strange, disrupting automatic perception. The practice of "reverse thinking"—assuming the solution exists and working backwards—challenges linear causality and opens new possibilities. The explicit attention to "mental blocks" recognises that interpreters' assumptions shape what they can see. The suspension of certainties through what hermeneutics calls epoché creates the void necessary for new perception to emerge.

8.9. The Hermeneutic Depth that Enables Generalisation

Generalisation in Inspiration Labs proceeds through a structured architecture: specific engagement with a particular problem yields deep understanding; codification extracts elements potentially transferable; classification identifies patterns and structural similarities; recontextualization adapts insight to new situations while honouring local particularity. This is not the mechanical generalisation of positivist science—applying the same solution across contexts—but the interpretive generalisation of hermeneutic understanding—carrying insight from one context to another while remaining attentive to each context's unique features. The vehicle for this transfer is the "inspiration currency"—a principle, insight, or value extracted through deep interpretation that can be adapted and applied elsewhere.

Figure (7) presents the tangible outcomes of hermeneutic engagement in Inspiration Labs. Inspiration Currencies are defined as transferable insights and value generated through deep engagement with problems—principles rather than

procedures, deep understanding rather than surface technique. These currencies, such as "influencing without power" or "community goodwill," become assets that extend beyond immediate problem resolution.

The Generalization Architecture illustrates how specific insights transform into transferable knowledge through a structured progression: Specific Engagement (deep understanding of a particular problem), Extraction (codification of transferable elements), Abstraction (classification identifying structural similarities across contexts), and Recontextualization (adapting insight to new situations while honouring local particularity). This is explicitly distinguished from mechanical generalization—it is not about applying the same solution everywhere but about creative transfer of understanding across diverse contexts.

The Figure here concludes with the paper's core thesis: Inspiration Labs are interpretive practices that treat socio-economic problems as meaningful texts, transforming obstacles into opportunities and isolated difficulties into sources of generalizable insight.

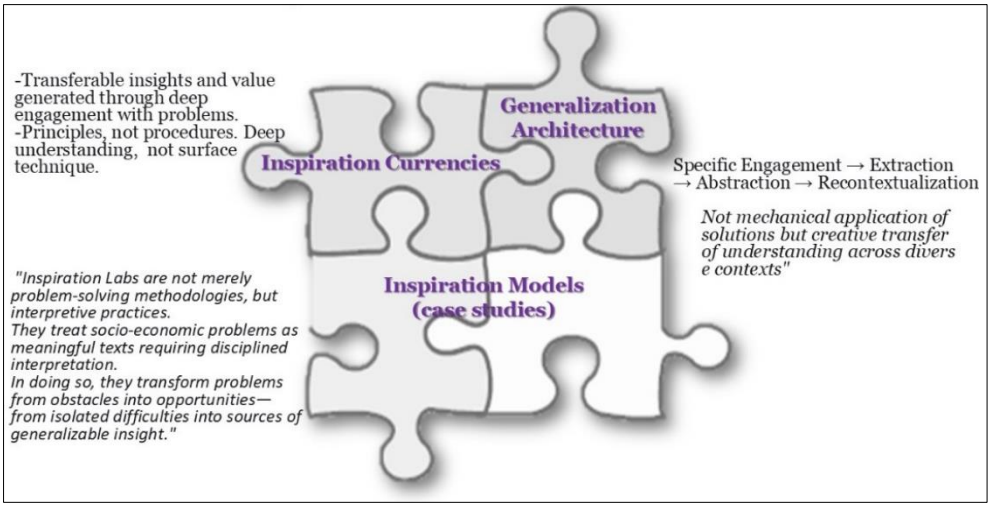

Fig 7: Practical Outcomes (Inspiration Currencies & Generalisation)

8.10. Limitations of the Study

This research, like all inquiries, has limitations that must be acknowledged. The cases were selected purposively, potentially introducing selection bias. However, purposive sampling based on explicit criteria, diversity across geography, domain, and time was applied. The study captures labs up to 2025; the ongoing evolution of methodology may not be fully represented. One has to recognise that the Inspiration Economy is a new concept which would continue to develop; therefore, the findings represent only the current understanding.

9. Final Word

This analysis has demonstrated that Inspiration Labs operationalize hermeneutic principles to achieve depth in problem-solving generalisation. Through the processes of codification, classification, and stratification, labs move beyond surface solutions to uncover deep insight—"inspiration currencies"—that carry transferable value across contexts.

The hermeneutic circle provides the methodological framework for this work, enabling the iterative movement between parts and whole that generates genuine understanding. Recognition of pre-understanding and mental blocks addresses the interpreter's role in shaping what can be seen. The shift from observation to absorption marks the transition from external examination to internal understanding—the fusion of horizons that produces new meaning.

Ultimately, this analysis reveals that Inspiration Labs are not merely problem-solving methodologies but interpretive practices. They treat socio-economic problems as meaningful texts requiring disciplined interpretation. In doing so, they transform problems from obstacles into opportunities—from isolated difficulties into sources of generalizable insight. This is the depth of generalisation that hermeneutic engagement makes possible: not the mechanical application of solutions but the creative transfer of understanding across the diverse contexts of human social and economic life.

This paper has traced the arc from Hermes to Inspiration Labs—from the messenger who bridged worlds to the communities that bridge problems and possibilities. It has shown that hermeneutics, far from being an esoteric philosophical discipline, is a practical art essential for navigating complexity. It has demonstrated that Inspiration Labs, far from being mere problem-solving techniques, are profound exercises in collective interpretation. And it has suggested that the encounter between hermeneutic philosophy and Inspiration Economy practice is not a one-time event but an ongoing conversation—one that will continue to generate insight, inspire action, and create value for communities seeking to transform their challenges into opportunities.

The work continues. The circle turns. Horizons fuse. New meanings emerge. And humanity moves, however incrementally, toward the positive transformation that is always possible when we engage deeply, interpret generously, and act wisely.

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