

The innovation management imperative for Europe's economic and social future

- Leveraging the ISO 56000 family of standards for innovation excellence and competitiveness

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Executive summary

Europe faces a widening competitiveness gap as productivity growth stalls, private-sector R&D intensity lags global peers, and too few organizations convert insights and ideas into scalable value. This deficit is structural: innovation is still too often episodic, siloed, and dependent on individuals rather than embedded capabilities. The consequences are clear: slower growth, weakened technological sovereignty, and reduced capacity to deliver on the green and digital transitions. It is time for Europe to systematically upgrade how innovation activities are led and managed across companies and public institutions.

ISO 56001 offers a ready, internationally agreed solution. As the first requirements standard for innovation management systems, it provides a practical, certifiable framework that any organization, large or small, private or public, can adopt to make innovation efforts repeatable, measurable, and aligned with strategy. It clarifies leadership responsibilities, sets up portfolio and process discipline from opportunity identification to deployment, and builds in monitoring and continuous improvement without constraining creativity. Crucially, it integrates seamlessly with established ISO management systems (e.g., quality and environment), enabling efficient, enterprise-wide adoption. Alongside organizational certification, emerging personal certification of innovation management professionals creates a complementary skills pipeline to lead change on the ground.

Promoting ISO 56001 aligns directly with EU policy goals. It strengthens firm-level innovation performance, accelerates diffusion of best practice across value chains and borders, and provides common language and assurance that reduce friction in public-private collaborations and consortia.

Policy-makers can catalyze rapid uptake through a focused package of actions. First, signal priority by referencing ISO 56001 in EU competitiveness, industrial, and cohesion instruments, and encouraging its use in member state strategies. Second, boost awareness and capability via EU-wide training, toolkits, and local language guidance delivered through national standards and certification bodies, innovation agencies, and business networks, with special emphasis on SMEs. Third, create adoption incentives by tying funding, grants, coaching, and selected procurement preferences to demonstrable innovation management maturity or certification, lowering costs and rewarding early movers. Fourth, professionalize the field by co-funding education, training, and Europe-wide personal certification aligned with ISO 56000 competencies, building a scalable cadre of certified innovation leaders. Fifth, lead by example: pilot ISO 56001 inside EU agencies and flagship national or municipal organizations to improve public-sector innovation efforts and provide reference models. Finally, measure what matters by tracking organizational and personal certifications and incorporating innovation management capability indicators into European scoreboards to sustain momentum and accountability.

The ask of policy-makers is straightforward and urgent. Within two to three years, these steps can lift thousands of organizations to a higher level of innovation discipline, shorten time-to-impact for green and digital solutions, and crowd-in private investment by de-risking execution. Europe has a narrow window to convert intent into performance. Making ISO 56001 a cornerstone of EU and national innovation policy is a low-regret, high-leverage move that contributes to restoring competitiveness, strengthening resilience, and delivering tangible benefits to citizens.

Europe's competitiveness and innovation challenges

Europe is facing a moment of reckoning in its global competitiveness. In recent years, an alarming gap has opened between Europe and leading economies like the United States and China in innovation and growth. Former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi warned that for the first time since the Cold War, Europe “must genuinely fear for our self-preservation” if it cannot close this gap, cautioning that without a unified response the continent could face a “slow agony” of decline.

The sense of urgency is well-founded: Europe's economic growth has lagged, productivity gains have stalled, and its share of cutting-edge innovation is shrinking. This trend has broad consequences: from weaker economic growth and fewer high-quality jobs to an erosion of Europe's global influence and its ability to sustain its social model. Unless Europe can re-energize innovation-driven growth, even its social inclusion and sustainability strengths could be compromised, undermining Europeans' high standard of living. The stakes for Europe's economy and society are enormous.

Several root causes underlie Europe's innovation and competitiveness challenges. Research and development (R&D) investment remains comparatively low, especially in the private sector. European businesses invest about 1.3% of GDP in R&D, roughly half the level in the US (2.4%). European industry is still heavily focused on medium-tech sectors, like automotive machinery, and has been slower to shift into high-tech, R&D-intensive fields. As a result, Europe generates fewer breakthrough innovations and patents in critical areas such as artificial intelligence, biotech, and semiconductors than its global peers. This shortfall in high-tech innovation is a significant competitive disadvantage as technology rapidly advances.

Structural factors further exacerbate the problem. Europe's innovation ecosystem is fragmented along national lines, with a segmented market and varying regulations that inhibit scaling new ideas across the continent. Many European firms, especially small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs), struggle with the costs and complexities of innovating, often lacking the resources or know-how to turn insights and ideas into practical and marketable solutions. Rigid labor markets and conservative corporate cultures in some regions can make it harder for new innovative firms to emerge and for established ones to radically reinvent themselves. Moreover, Europe's financial system favors lower-risk debt financing over venture capital, limiting funding for high-risk, high-reward innovation efforts.

These factors, combined with relatively few world-leading research universities and a slower uptake of disruptive new companies, create an environment where innovation happens inconsistently and often in silos. Many organizations still treat innovation initiatives as a one-off project or isolated R&D activity, rather than a continuous, cross-cutting effort.

Looking ahead, Europe faces a challenging future if these issues go unaddressed. Global competition intensifies as transformative technologies reshape industries, from artificial intelligence to clean energy solutions. This wave of disruption is testing Europe's traditional strengths in industrial excellence. External pressures, such as energy supply shocks and geopolitical instability, have further exposed Europe's vulnerabilities in recent years.

The continent could become increasingly dependent on foreign technologies, and more dynamic global competitors could overtake its companies. Draghi's report bluntly noted that without bold action, Europe's economic trajectory could be one of stagnation. In contrast, if

Europe can unlock more substantial innovation efforts, it will not only boost growth and productivity but also equip the society to tackle future challenges and sustain its welfare and environmental commitments.

Purpose of this white paper

This white paper aims to raise awareness among Europe's policy-makers and business leaders that the ISO 56000 family of innovation management standards can significantly contribute to addressing Europe's innovation and competitiveness challenges.

The paper is a call to action, urging Europe to treat innovation management capability as a strategic priority in its own right. Introducing a concrete and actionable framework, ISO 56001 Innovation management system, to build innovation capabilities, aims to help European economies and organizations systematically improve their innovation performance, thereby strengthening competitiveness.

The target audience for this white paper is primarily policy- and decision-makers in the European Commission and other European institutions, as well as national governments and public bodies that shape innovation and industrial policy. It is also directed at key stakeholders in Europe's innovation ecosystem – standards organizations, industry associations, innovation agencies, and private and public sector executives. These are the actors who can champion and implement the recommendations.

The European Commission, in particular, has the reach to integrate this standard into EU initiatives and funding programs, while national authorities can incorporate it into country-level innovation strategies. Standardization organizations, certification bodies, and industry groups will be essential partners in spreading and supporting the standard's use.

The ultimate purpose is to inspire these audiences to see ISO 56001 not as an abstract technical norm, but as a timely policy instrument and practical tool to help solve Europe's innovation crisis.

In the following sections, we detail what ISO 56001 entails, why it is uniquely well-suited to Europe's needs, and what specific actions should be taken to promote its adoption across the continent.

A framework for innovation management excellence

ISO 56001 is the world's first international requirements standard for innovation management systems, published in 2024, after years of development by global experts. In essence, ISO 56001 specifies what an organization must have in place to systematically drive and manage innovation efforts, much as ISO 9001 does for quality management. It provides requirements for establishing, implementing, maintaining, and continually improving an innovation management system within an organization. The standard's overarching goal is to enhance an organization's ability to innovate consistently and successfully, not through ad-hoc efforts or genius moments alone, but via structured processes and leadership.

Crucially, ISO 56001 is designed to apply to any organization, public or private, regardless of size or sector. Whether it's a multinational corporation, a small manufacturing firm, a university, or a government department, any organization can use this framework to foster innovation activities

in a tailored way. The standard offers a systematic approach to managing uncertainty and creativity: it helps organizations create the conditions and remove barriers for new insights and ideas to emerge and be converted into value. It can be new products, services, processes, business models, or methods.

The content of ISO 56001 covers all the success factors of a robust innovation management system. It addresses leadership, culture, and strategy, requiring, for example, that top management demonstrate clear commitment to innovation activities and align innovation objectives with the organization's overall strategy. The standard then describes key processes and structures: from planning and portfolio management of innovation initiatives and projects, to securing necessary resources and competencies, to managing innovation processes from opportunity identification through development to deployment.

Finally, ISO 56001 requires mechanisms for monitoring, measuring, and continuously improving innovation performance. This means organizations must define innovation metrics, track progress, learn from successes and failures, and refine their approaches over time. In short, ISO 56001 is a comprehensive "checklist" of practices for making innovation efforts a core, managed activity.

ISO 56001's credibility stems from its rigorous and inclusive development process. It was developed through ISO's consensus-based approach with contributions from leading innovation experts in over 50 countries, including European nations at the forefront of innovation policy. This means the standard reflects global best practices and lessons learned across different cultures and sectors. It is an internationally agreed-upon framework and a shared language for innovation management.

Adopting ISO 56001 signals that an organization is managing innovation efforts to a world-class standard, just as ISO 9001 certification long signaled quality excellence. In fact, ISO 56001 is built to integrate with other ISO management standards so organizations can seamlessly embed innovation management alongside quality, environmental, artificial intelligence, or other management systems. This integration capability is vital for efficiency and uptake.

A key aspect of ISO 56001 is that it enables formal certification of an organization's innovation management system by independent accredited certification bodies. With the standard now published, companies and public organizations can pursue certification to demonstrate that they meet the ISO 56001 requirements. It can serve as a trust mark when dealing with partners, investors, or customers who want assurance that the organization has a structured, effective innovation practice. Several leading European organizations have already begun aligning with the ISO 56000 framework, even before formal certification availability.

In addition to organizational certification, the ISO 56000 family supports personal certification in innovation management, an emerging policy instrument to professionalize innovation management and leadership. Across Europe, we see initiatives to certify individuals as innovation managers or professionals based on the competencies defined by the ISO standards. By ensuring individuals' competence in systematically managing innovation activities, such personal certification provides value through greater confidence, credibility, and trust in those individuals' capabilities.

Together, organizational certification and personal certification form a complementary toolkit: organizations can be certified for having the right innovation structures and processes, and professionals can be certified for having the proper innovation knowledge and skills. Policy-

makers can leverage both as instruments to raise the overall innovation management capacity of the economy.

In summary, ISO 56001 offers Europe a credible, structured framework – internationally vetted and available for third-party certification – to make innovation efforts a managed discipline. It provides the common language and benchmarks needed to transform innovation endeavors from a buzzword into a reliably repeatable engine of competitiveness.

The case for promoting ISO 56001 in Europe

Given Europe's innovation challenges, promoting the adoption of ISO 56001 across companies and public organizations could be a game-changer for innovation performance and competitiveness. This standard directly addresses many root causes of Europe's innovation shortfall by instilling the structures, processes, culture, and discipline needed for sustained innovation success.

Firstly, ISO 56001 helps organizations overcome the ad hoc, siloed approach to innovation activities prevalent in many European firms. By implementing the standard, an organization commits to treating innovation efforts as a core, cross-cutting system with leadership oversight, clear objectives, allocated resources, and ongoing evaluation.

As one of the standard's early adopters observed, creating a common and consistent language for innovation activities across the organization is a significant benefit. When everyone from top management to front-line employees shares the same innovation framework, there is far better visibility of the innovation structures and processes, and more sharing of best practices.

This is crucial for Europe, where fragmentation is an issue. Widespread use of a common innovation management framework would allow European companies, SMEs, and research organizations to collaborate more easily.

Secondly, ISO 56001 can significantly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of innovation investments, thereby boosting Europe's return on R&D spending. Organizations are prompted to systematically identify opportunities and risks, experiment in a controlled manner, and use data to refine insights and ideas rather than pouring resources into unstructured efforts. As a result, they are more likely to realize value faster and with greater precision.

These efficiency gains are vital in Europe's often resource-constrained innovation environment, especially for SMEs. Empirical evidence suggests that companies managing innovation activities systematically achieve higher innovation output per euro invested.

The standard essentially brings the rigor of other organizational processes to the innovation domain, without stifling creativity. This capability to innovate reliably, not just occasionally, will separate competitive players from laggards in a fast-paced world.

Moreover, adopting ISO 56001 can strengthen Europe's innovation *culture* and talent base, which is a more intangible but critical aspect of competitiveness. The standard's requirements encourage leadership to foster an innovation-friendly culture, one that encourages experimentation, rewards learning from successes and failures, and involves employees at all levels.

Over time, as more organizations implement these practices, a broader European workforce will be cultivated that is skilled in innovation management. The availability of personal certification further builds a cadre of innovation leaders who are formally trained and recognized.

Governments and educational institutions can leverage this by aligning curricula and training programs with ISO 56000 principles, ensuring new graduates and managers are fluent in innovation management thinking.

In short, ISO 56001 helps embed innovation capability as a long-term organizational asset, not dependent solely on a few creative individuals. As one innovation expert put it, the ISO standards “emphasize conditions that promote, rather than confine, creative processes”, enabling creativity to flourish within a supportive structure. This balance is precisely what many European entities need to become more innovative without losing their identity.

For European policy-makers, actively promoting ISO 56001 is a high-leverage intervention to improve the innovation ecosystem at scale. By endorsing and facilitating the adoption of the standard, authorities can create a common foundation upon which various innovation policies and programs can be built.

Notably, an innovation management system based on ISO 56001 can serve as a shared framework for organizations to innovate together and build trust in each other’s innovation capabilities. This is crucial for Europe’s many collaborative research and innovation projects, public-private partnerships, and cross-border initiatives. If each partner in an innovation ecosystem has an aligned or certified innovation management system, they can integrate their efforts more smoothly. It also becomes easier for large companies to involve startups or SMEs in their supply chain or R&D&I consortia, because ISO 56001 assures that these smaller players meet a certain standard of innovation management maturity.

For investors and funding agencies, an ISO 56001 alignment or certification is a positive signal: it indicates that an organization is likely to manage grant money or venture capital for innovation initiatives methodically, increasing the chances of successful outcomes. An EU funding program or venture fund might prioritize organizations that demonstrate innovation capacity via ISO 56001, similar to how quality certifications can be prerequisites in procurement.

In sum, the case for Europe to promote ISO 56001 rests on the substantial benefits its adoption can generate: more effective innovation structures and processes within firms, a stronger culture and skills base for innovation activities, greater collaboration and trust in innovation ecosystems, and ultimately a higher rate of innovative outputs fuelling economic and social progress.

It provides a unifying framework to tackle Europe’s fragmented innovation landscape. At a time when Europe urgently needs to ignite innovation efforts across the board, ISO 56001 offers a ready, internationally backed solution. What remains is for policy-makers to act with urgency to drive its uptake, making it a cornerstone of Europe’s strategy to regain innovation leadership.

Ten actions to catalyze ISO 56001 adoption in Europe

To leverage ISO 56001 as a catalyst for Europe’s innovation renewal, a coordinated set of short- and mid-term actions is needed. The following ten actions are proposed, each targeting a critical leverage point. Together, they form a comprehensive plan to embed innovation management excellence across European industry and the public sector.

Action 1: Integrate ISO 56001 into European innovation policy frameworks

Nature: Strategic policy endorsement. The European Commission should formally recognize ISO 56001 in its high-level policy communications and strategies on competitiveness and innovation. For example, initiatives like the Competitiveness Compass roadmap and the new “Clean Industrial Deal” could explicitly call out ISO 56001 adoption as a means to boost innovation capacity.

Why it’s critical: A clear endorsement from the EU level will signal to all Member States and businesses that building innovation capabilities is a policy priority, lending it legitimacy and urgency. It positions ISO 56001 as part of Europe’s official solution to its innovation gap, encouraging alignment of national policies.

Who should initiate: The European Commission (notably DG GROW and DG RTD) and the European Council should include references to ISO 56001 in relevant resolutions, recommendations, or funding guidelines. National governments can then incorporate the standard into their own innovation and industrial strategies.

Action 2: Launch a Europe-wide awareness and capacity-building campaign

Nature: Outreach and education. An intensive campaign should be rolled out to inform companies (including SMEs), public organizations, and innovation support entities about ISO 56001 and how to implement it.

Why critical: Many organizations are unaware that a comprehensive innovation management standard exists. Awareness is the first step to adoption; decision-makers need to understand the standard's benefits and basics. Moreover, SMEs often lack the internal expertise to implement new standards, so capacity-building is essential.

Who should initiate: This can be a joint effort by the European Commission, perhaps through the European Innovation Council and Enterprise Europe Network, and national innovation agencies. EU-wide webinars, workshops in local languages via national standards bodies, practical guidebooks, and online toolkits can be deployed. Standardization organizations like ISO and CEN, and bodies like BSI, DIN, AFNOR, etc., would be key partners in providing content and training. Industry and sectoral associations should also be mobilized to host sector-specific sessions.

Action 3: Incentivize adoption through funding, grants, and procurement

Nature: Financial and market incentives. European and national authorities should create incentives that reward organizations for aligning with or acquiring certification according to ISO 56001.

Why critical: Shifting organizational behavior often requires concrete incentives. Policy can accelerate uptake by lowering the cost or adding rewards for adoption, especially among resource-constrained entities.

Who should initiate: The European Commission can embed such incentives in EU funding programs. For instance, Horizon Europe or Digital Europe program calls could award additional points to proposals if the lead organization or consortium partners have an ISO 56001-aligned innovation management system. This encourages research and innovation consortia to build in good innovation practices. Similarly, EU regional development funds that support SMEs could include grants for “innovation management system implementation”, essentially helping SMEs cover the cost of training or consulting to adopt ISO 56001. Member State governments can introduce tax credits or vouchers for companies that undergo ISO 56001 certification, analogous to incentives sometimes offered for quality certifications.

Another powerful lever is public procurement: contracting authorities at EU, national, and local levels could start to include innovation management maturity as a criterion in tender evaluations. For example, a city government tendering a smart infrastructure project might favor bidders who demonstrate a certified innovation management system, on the logic that they will be more likely to deliver creative and effective solutions. Even if not a strict requirement, a gentle preference in procurement can drive companies to get on board.

EU funding agencies such as the European Innovation Council and EISMEA, national SME development agencies, and public procurement officials all play a role. Accreditation and certification bodies are stakeholders too, as an increase in demand for ISO 56001 certification will require them to scale up auditor capacity.

Action 4: Develop comprehensive training and certification programs for innovation management

Nature: Knowledge and skills development. To supply the human capital needed to implement ISO 56001, Europe should invest in training programs and professional certification for innovation management.

Why critical: A standard is only as good as the people implementing it. Many organizations need trained innovation managers or champions to drive ISO 56001 internally. By equipping professionals with the proper knowledge and skills and certifying them, we create agents of change who can lead innovation management improvements from within.

Who should initiate: This requires collaboration between educational institutions, professional bodies, training providers, and standardization organizations. The European Commission could fund the development of curricula and courses on systematic innovation management aligned to ISO 56000. Universities and business schools across Europe should be encouraged to include innovation management systems in MBA and engineering management programs. Meanwhile, national standards bodies or authorized institutes can roll out short-term training courses for executives and innovation teams focused on ISO 56001 implementation.

Critically, personal certification schemes for innovation management professionals should be expanded Europe-wide. A common European or international certification could be developed based on Swedish and Italian examples. ISO and CEN can provide a basis for harmonizing these efforts, and international groups like ISPIM, the International Society for Professional Innovation Management, can mobilize the researcher and practitioner community.

Employers (companies and public organizations) are also stakeholders, as they should be encouraged to send their staff for such training and recognize the value of certification. Over the next few years, Europe should aim to certify a sizable cohort of innovation management

professionals, creating a talent pool capable of implementing and maintaining innovation management systems in organizations large and small.

Action 5: Mobilize industry associations and networks to champion ISO 56001

Nature: Bottom-up promotion and peer learning. European industry federations and business networks, both cross-sector and sector-specific, should be enlisted to promote ISO 56001 among their members and facilitate best-practice sharing.

Why critical: Companies often listen to their peers and industry bodies more than government proclamations. If innovation management excellence becomes a theme championed by respected industry groups, it can drive broader voluntary adoption. Moreover, different industries have unique innovation contexts, for example, pharma vs. manufacturing vs. services, so sectoral associations can tailor guidance on applying ISO 56001 in their domain.

Who should initiate: The EU could host a roundtable with major European business associations to launch an “Innovation Management Initiative”. This would encourage each association to integrate ISO 56001 into their conferences, publications, and member services. For example, an automotive industry association might produce a guideline or workshop on using ISO 56001 to drive mobility innovation efforts, or a healthcare industry forum might share how structured innovation management systems can accelerate medical breakthroughs.

Industry cluster organizations and innovation hubs are also key actors that could adopt the standard as part of cluster and innovation ecosystem development. By creating a community of businesses committed to ISO 56001, firms can benchmark themselves and learn practical tips from others’ implementation journeys.

Over time, these networks can produce case studies and sector-specific extensions of ISO 56001, enriching the base standard with examples that make it even more convincing and easier to adopt for each industry or sector.

Action 6: Lead by example in the public sector

Nature: Public sector adoption and pilot projects. European public authorities at all levels should themselves implement ISO 56001 within public sector organizations, from EU agencies to national ministries and local government departments, to improve public-sector innovation efficiency and send a strong signal to the market.

Why critical: Governments and public institutions face innovation challenges in delivering better services and policies. By adopting ISO 56001 internally, they can increase their capacity to innovate in areas like digital government, smart cities, or regulatory experimentation. This not only directly benefits society through better public outcomes, but it also powerfully demonstrates confidence in the standard.

Who should initiate: The European Commission could initiate a pilot to apply ISO 56001 in one of its departments or agencies. Likewise, national governments can choose flagship departments. Municipalities and cities could adopt it to systematically drive urban innovations such as smart mobility and energy-saving initiatives. These pilots could be supported by expert consultants and lead to certification, making them some of the first public-sector ISO 56001 certifications globally, giving Europe a pioneering role.

Public sector innovation labs, research and technology institutes, civil service training schools, and organizations like the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) can be involved in providing guidance and sharing lessons internationally. By implementing these actions, Europe's public authorities can turn interest into action, fostering an innovation culture in government, and creating reference examples that can inspire broader public-sector adoption across the EU.

Action 7: Embed ISO 56001 in innovation ecosystems and related EU programs

Nature: Ecosystem alignment. Ensure that major European innovation initiatives, platforms, and ecosystems incorporate ISO 56001 as a foundational element.

Why critical: Europe has numerous innovation support structures, such as Digital Innovation Hubs, EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), incubators, etc. These ecosystems are most effective when participants share common frameworks and expectations. Suppose universities, startups, and corporations in a network all understand ISO 56001. In that case, their collaboration becomes easier and more productive because they have a shared language and approach to managing joint innovation initiatives and projects. It can also streamline how results are transferred or scaled among partners.

Who should initiate: The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) could encourage each of its KICs to train their member organizations in ISO 56001 and use it in their own innovation management. The European Innovation Council (EIC) could require its accelerator grant winners to perform an innovation management assessment as part of the coaching they receive. Cross-border programs like Euroclusters or Interreg could fund projects that help regions implement ISO 56001 in local companies, thereby strengthening regional innovation ecosystems.

Innovation cluster managers, science and technology parks, and research collaborations (e.g. Horizon Europe projects) are stakeholders who can agree to adopt the standard for managing innovation efforts. Making ISO 56001 a “common language” across EU-funded innovation networks helps scale best practices quickly through existing channels, multiplying the impact beyond individual organizations.

Action 8: Establish monitoring and benchmarking of innovation management capability

Nature: Metrics and transparency. The EU, in partnership with national statistical offices or innovation observatories, should start measuring and tracking the adoption of systematic innovation management practices, such as ISO 56001, and include these metrics in innovation scoreboards and reports.

Why critical: What gets measured gets done. The European Innovation Scoreboard currently evaluates countries on indicators like R&D spending, patents, SMEs innovating, etc., but it does not explicitly measure innovation management capacity inside organizations. Introducing an indicator, for example, the percentage of companies with an innovation management system or certification, or an index of innovation management maturity, would incentivize countries to pay attention to this aspect. Tracking progress will allow policymakers to see if the promotion efforts yield results.

Who should initiate: The European Commission (DG RTD or JRC) can integrate such indicators into the European Innovation Scoreboard and the Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard. Eurostat could explore collecting data via innovation surveys, for example, adding questions about using innovation management standards in the Community Innovation Survey. National innovation agencies could also maintain dashboards on how many organizations in their country use the ISO 56000 framework or have trained innovation managers.

Researchers in innovation management studies, who can help design meaningful metrics, and organizations like OECD, which could include innovation management in its analyses, are relevant. This data-driven approach will keep innovation management on the policy radar, beyond just anecdotes.

Action 9: Recognize and reward excellence in innovation management

Nature: Awards and public recognition. Introduce European and national award programs or certification labels to honor organizations and individuals that excel in innovation management, particularly those who have adopted ISO 56001 successfully.

Why critical: Recognition is a powerful motivator. Celebrating early adopters and high performers creates role models and healthy competition among peers. It also raises general awareness as media and business circles note award winners.

Who should initiate: The European Commission could add a category to its annual innovation or industry awards for “Innovation Management Excellence”, where criteria include the use of ISO 56001 or equivalent practices. Alternatively, a dedicated award, perhaps in partnership with EUREKA or other intergovernmental innovation networks, could be launched to highlight the best innovation management system implementations in European companies, SMEs, and public agencies. National governments or industry bodies can do the same at their level.

Media outlets and business journals are stakeholders to engage, as their coverage amplifies recognition. Also, certification bodies may sponsor such awards, as it aligns with their mission. By publicly showcasing organizations already implementing ISO 56001, this action proves that the standard works in practice and yields results.

Action 10: Create an EU Innovation Management Forum for ongoing knowledge sharing

Nature: Networking and continuous improvement. Establish a formal community of practice at the European level focused on innovation management systems (IMS), where practitioners, experts, and policy-makers can exchange experiences, tools, and improvements related to ISO 56001.

Why critical: Adoption is not a one-off event; organizations must refine and evolve their innovation management approaches. A forum enables collective learning; what worked, what obstacles were faced, how the standard might be improved in future revisions, etc. It also keeps the momentum by maintaining a network of advocates.

Who should initiate: The European Commission, potentially through the Joint Research Centre or EIC, could convene this forum annually, for example, a European Innovation Management Forum conference. Standards bodies and international bodies can support it. The forum would include case study presentations from companies and public entities that implemented

ISO 56001, workshops on specific aspects, such as “measuring innovation performance” or “building an innovation portfolio process, and policy sessions to discuss further needs. It should involve the technical experts who developed the standard and the end-users implementing it, to facilitate feedback loops.

Innovation consultants, academic researchers in innovation management, and organizations like the RADMA and ISPIM. Over time, this forum could also coordinate with international peers, ensuring Europe remains at the forefront of innovation management practices globally. This adaptability and shared knowledge will maximize the standard’s impact on innovation outcomes.

Each of these ten actions addresses the challenges from a different angle: policy, incentives, skills, networks, public sector, measurement, recognition, and continuous learning. Implemented together, they create an enabling environment where systematic innovation management based on ISO 56001 can spread rapidly and take root deeply across Europe’s economy. European institutions should treat this like a coordinated campaign, like past campaigns for quality management or digital adoption.

In the short term (next 1–2 years), actions like awareness campaigns, policy endorsements, and pilot projects can be launched. In the medium term (3–5 years), we should see measurable increases in adoption, a growing cohort of certified organizations and professionals, and integration of innovation management excellence into the mainstream criteria of business and public sector success. The result will be a fundamentally upgraded “innovation infrastructure” at the organizational level, benefiting Europe’s economic and social future.

Summary and conclusion

Europe’s future prosperity hinges on its ability to innovate better and faster in the face of intense global competition and rapid change. The analysis in this paper has shown that Europe’s current innovation shortfalls are systemic, but not irreversible. By embracing systematic innovation management based on ISO 56001, the international framework for innovation management systems, Europe has a potent tool to build up its innovation capabilities across all sectors. This is not a theoretical fix: it means instilling the practical innovation habits, processes, and culture in thousands of organizations, large and small, public and private. The urgency cannot be overstated. But if Europe acts decisively now, it can unleash a new wave of innovation-driven growth that secures higher productivity and competitiveness and the ability to solve societal challenges on its own terms.

The recommendations, from policy endorsements and incentives to training and recognition programs, together create a roadmap for action. They are designed to remove barriers and build enablers so that adopting effective and efficient innovation practices becomes easy, advantageous, and eventually commonplace. Crucially, these actions engage all stakeholders: the EU and governments provide vision and support, standard bodies and associations provide know-how and outreach, and companies and public institutions take the initiative to improve themselves. Everyone has a role to play in this innovation management uplift.

Time is of the essence. The adoption of ISO 56001 across Europe should be pursued with the same resolve as past grand initiatives such as the push for a single digital market or the Green

Deal. Imagine in a few years: European SMEs widely using innovation scorecards and systems to become agile innovators; large firms rejuvenating their R&D pipelines and effectively partnering with startups; public agencies continually improving services through structured innovation efforts, all speaking a common innovation management language.

In conclusion, the European Commission and relevant authorities must act with urgency and determination to drive the adoption of ISO 56001. The framework is ready; the need is evident. By taking the ten actions outlined, policy-makers can trigger a powerful positive change in Europe's innovation culture and performance. The reward will be a more innovative Europe: one that competes effectively with other economies and delivers greater prosperity and solutions to its citizens. It is time to move from intent to action, and from isolated efforts to a systemic movement for innovation excellence.

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