THE JOURNEY OF MINDLAB

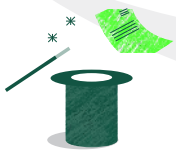
How do you build an innovation lab in the heart of the central administration? How do you revolutionize a public sector from within? Or just challenge it productively?

How do you transform public service systems and bureaucratic structures from a human-centered approach?

In MindLab, we still haven't found all the answers– but in the past decade, we've explored and tested various ways of finding them. In this process, we have kept questioning our purpose, role, mandate and future possibilities.

It is has been a bumpy road and we are certainly not there yet. So the journey continues.

The MindLab Team
See more: mind-lab.dk / #mindlab



1ST GENERATION
2002 – 2006

MINDLAB AS CREATIVE PLATFORM

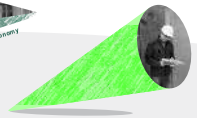
2006

After having run nearly 280 workshops between 2002 and 2006, the demand for MindLab's support decreased. This left a strategic choice for the future.

After a thorough process of reflection, MindLab was turned into a cross-ministerial innovation unit focusing on user-centered methods to enhance innovation across government.

"Mindlab is the equivalent of throwing a grenade at bureaucracy"

The first statements about MindLab of Mikkel B. Rasmussen



2ND GENERATION
2007 – 2009

MINDLAB AS USER ORIENTATED INNOVATION UNIT

"To lead innovation is to go forth into unknown territory. If it takes a bit of 'civil disobedience' to take the first step, then maybe that is what we need."

Christian Bason,
Leading Public Sector Innovation, 2010

3RD GENERATION
2010 – 2011

MINDLAB AS CATALYST OF AN INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT

"Our goal is to generate the aspiration for change in our clients. That's how you break through bureaucracy and create innovation"

Christian Bason in Monocle, 2011

4TH GENERATION
2012 – 2013

MINDLAB AS STRATEGIC CHANGE PARTNER

2011

The two first industrial PhD projects affiliated in MindLab focusing on implementation of employment policy (Nina Holm Vohnsen) and the practice of tax compliance (Karen Boll) are completed.

Scientific research process and insights are exposing delicate bureaucratic practices. This challenges the relationship to the Ministry of Employment and questions MindLab's loyalty.

Ministry of Taxation withdraws from MindLab due to organizational change within the ministry.

How Public Design
Global conference hosted by MindLab is catalyzing an emerging community of public innovation practice.

2010 – 2011

Multiple presentations for international governments, organizations and institutions.

Case with Dennis, a young taxpayer in Denmark, goes 'viral' in Ministry of Taxation as an audio-reference point, driving new strategic and organizational developments in ministry.

2011

MindLabs existence questioned!
Permanent secretaries are asking: What is the actual value-contribution of MindLab?

Election in Denmark: New left-wing government elected with significant eagerness of making big reforms on several policy areas.

2010

"Away with the Red Tape"
First larger cross-ministerial project.

Christian Bason published the book: "Leading Public Sector Innovation" based on experiences from MindLab which becomes an international reference point in the literature on public innovation.

MindLab launches the public sector innovation toolkit "The innovation guide" on an online platform.

Mindlab had grown larger, now around 15 employees.

2009

Financial crisis: Actualized reflection on core operations and new ways of developing the public sector.

Moment of serendipity
Top-public managers from UK are meeting the three Permanent Secretaries of the MindLab owners. They are recognized as innovative top- managers because of MindLab.

"Experienced legal rights"
Using art as a central component in illustrating a public challenge; experimenting with the limits of knowledge input to decision-making processes.

2007

Christian Bason starts as manager of MindLab.

New team of 5 hired
Focused on design, social research and public administration.

The Danish Ministry of Employment becomes part of the ownership of MindLab.

Right-wing government gets re-elected in Denmark. De-bureaucratization and digitalization are significant part of the government focus.

2008

Scientific research
The partner ministries invest in 3 PhD-projects organized between MindLab and the universities.

"MindLab wants to lead a global trend of transforming new insights in human and business reality to solutions, creating a positive change in society"

Strategy of MindLab, 2008

2007

Project: "Burden Hunters" Identifying administrative burdens for businesses; concrete illustration of the potential of MindLab methodology within a politically supported agenda.

2008

"New service journey for work injured citizens"
First MindLab project leading to a new organizational strategy in a large public organization.

Facilitation of "Working-labs" and cross-ministerial project-manager networks as part of the project management-education in the ministries: First successful attempt to build new capacity in terms of changing the skills and approaches of civil servants.

6TH GENERATION
FROM NOW!

ENABLER OF A NEW PUBLIC SECTOR CULTURE

"Innovation labs must transform from being facilitators of process and service design to enablers of the cultural change in the public sector, for innovation to disseminate as a culture of practice and leadership."

Thomas Prehn, 2015

2012

Ministry of Education is new partner.

The current board structure is replaced by a more strategic, decision-oriented model with only the permanent secretaries as board members. Along with this change, a new advisory board is formed with international experts from different fields to ensure that MindLab makes the most of its position and possibilities.

Seminar series: "Denmark is a great country!" "Proactive use of government platform to explore innovation potential.

First longer-term research collaboration – Nesta/MindLab publication on innovation in public policy.

2013

Strategic advisor the Danish minister of Education on New Nordic School and bottom-up development practices.

MindLab is leading the work for the EU-publication: "Powering European Public Sector Innovation: Towards A New Architecture" and advices Manuel Barroso on innovation strategy in the European Union.

Launch of research program
A strategic focus on using research as central component in projects and organizational development of the ministries.

2013

How Public Design
Policy workshops is held to let design-methods work everyday challenges of bureaucracy.

New approach to reform implementation. First project focused direct on applying human-centered design in core reform agendas focusing on the implementation of the reform of early pensions and flexjobs.

Partnership with UNDP around developing their innovation skills and capacity.

"MindLab works with the owners to create change that leads to the desired impact of citizens, companies and society."

Strategy, MindLab, 2013

5TH GENERATION
2014 – 2015

MINDLAB AS DEVELOPER OF CAPACITY

"How do innovation practices fit within the existing knowledge practices of the state while simultaneously reshaping the state institution itself?"

Jesper Christiansen, PhD thesis, 2014

2014

MindLab took a strategic step from being cross-ministerial to become "cross-public", adding the municipality of Odense to the circle of owners. This new formalized partnership with Odense recognized an increasing need for local experimentation.

Odense Municipality is new partner.

Christian Bason leaves Mindlab to become a Director at the Danish Design Centre.

Mindlab helps the UK government to set up a policy lab in the cabinet office.

2014

"Denmark as advanced production country": Strategic cross-ministerial project defining the future of Denmark's production policy.

Governance labs : Temporary partnership with the Ministry of Interior focusing on exploring new governance models for more trust-based public service systems.

Publishing of "Design for policy": Bringing policy-making and human-centered design together in an ambitious volume of practice-oriented research.

Workshop on public innovation labs at OECD: A significant sign of an emerging community of practice becoming recognized by existing institutional actors.

2014 – 2015

MindLab assists various governments set up innovation labs in their government administrations. Latest examples are Uruguay and Canada.

Development of new generic implementation model/mindset for the Ministry of Employment.

Thomas Prehn is appointed new Director of Mindlab.

Decisive moment | Research | Project

MIND LAB

THE JOURNEY OF MINDLAB

FROM 2002 UNTIL NOW

MIND LAB

mind-lab.dk

THE JOURNEY OF MINDLAB

THE START UP

"Where does innovation live in your Ministry?"

The Permanent Secretary of the (then) Ministry of Business Affairs was asked by leading business school academics. His ministry was in charge of fostering innovation in the private sector - but what about innovation in the public sector?

At that he accepted the challenge that the ministry should "take its own medicine". Innovation was to be incorporated as a core organizational practice. And so, he invested in the establishment of an innovation lab in his ministry; MindLab was born.

In the following, we've described the journey so far in six generations - each developing, expanding and anchoring our space of opportunity

MIND LAB IT'S SINCE 2007

+ 130 projects
+ 1000 Presentations
Advising + 150 governments
4 PhD projects
10 – 15 employees

1 ST GENERATION
2002 – 2006

MINDLAB AS CREATIVE PLATFORM

The first manager of MindLab described the establishment of MindLab as "Throwing a grenade inside bureaucracy". The expectations were high – the mission of MindLab was to give creativity and new ideas optimal conditions in the Ministry of Business Affairs by acting as a catalyst in the work with new strategies as well as supporting the development of creative competencies in the ministry. In the outside world, innovation was an emerging agenda – and questions on how to address this agenda in the public sector were increasing in intensity and numbers.

At this stage, a lot of focus was directed at the seemingly innovative and radically different interior physical space of MindLab. This space served the practical purpose of being a place capable of gathering people from across sectors and organizations in workshops. Its main purpose was to temporarily abandon the normal interest-driven meeting culture and engage people in collaborative problem-solving activities.

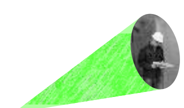
In the same sense, the space also functioned as a meeting place for everyone from students to top managers, deliberately trying to abolish normal hierarchical differences.

GENERIC CHARACTERISTICS

Approach: Ideation and creative facilitation; Innovation as ideas and policy concepts.

Key challenge: Acceptance of new ways of working.

Signs of success: Demonstrating that policy development could successfully be done in other ways than through inside-out analysis and formulation.



2 ND GENERATION
2007 – 2009

MINDLAB AS USER ORIENTATED INNOVATION UNIT

From the provocative statement of being a hand grenade at bureaucracy, MindLabs focus shifted towards a longer term focus on user-orientation, creating new solutions through qualitative insights of the concrete experiences of people and their interaction with public services. As the year of 2007 begins, MindLab is constituted as a cross-governmental unit between the Ministries of Taxation and Economics and Business Affairs. Later in this year, the Ministry of Employment enters formally as partner.

Christian Bason started as new manager of MindLab in 2007. When recruiting staff, MindLab was explicitly asking potential applicants: "Do you want to revolutionize the public sector from within?" A thorough process of hiring a new team was carried out with careful attention to people's skills – in particular focused on the combination of social research, design and public administration – as well as on personal attributes like curiosity, openness and empathy.

This phase was also giving birth to an ambitious research agenda at MindLab, and investments were made to make PhD projects part of MindLab's value-creation. Beyond this, MindLab's project work was at this stage characterized by a significant emphasis on service design as method to create new solution concepts and, increasingly, also organizational development.

GENERIC CHARACTERISTICS

Approach: Service innovation labs; focus on generating user-oriented insights to drive innovation with use of service design, project management and creative facilitation. Scientific research as ongoing process of research and reflection on Mindlabs work.

Key challenge: Creating awareness of user-driven innovation; integrating innovation approaches as legitimate parts of public development practice.

Finding the right balance between small-scale assignments and larger scale projects.

Signs of success: That someone actually wanted to work with MindLab (2007).

Later to get the buy-in from the top management in projects and in research (2008).

3 RD GENERATION
2010 – 2011

MINDLAB AS CATALYST OF AN INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT

In 2010, MindLab had grown larger, now around 15 employees– and with a split management between the director and a deputy director. At this time, an increasing demand emerged from international governments, public organizations, research institutions and other actors involved in public innovation activities. As a response, MindLab became heavily invested in raising awareness and creating a widespread, international community of innovation practice.

While investing in being a catalyst of an emerging international movement, MindLab faced much more threatening circumstances in relation to the concrete value-creation for the ministerial owners of MindLab. Combined with rumors of a planned closing of the Helsinki Design Lab, this sparked much reflection on the strategy of MindLab going forward.

This reflection process led to a shift in the mission of MindLab from "challenging the system" to being a"co-worker of the system".

This connected productively with an emerging agenda outside of the green-striped doors of MindLab where "co-creation" and "co-production" as approaches to public development offered new perspectives on how to develop new solutions with people and not for them.

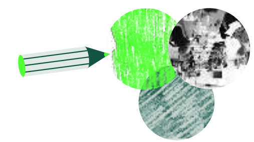
GENERIC CHARACTERISTICS

Approach: Advocacy and awareness raising. Co-creating with users and co-production to create professional empathy and trust among public managers.

Key challenge: Finding the right balance between investing in the creation of a widespread community of practice and the concrete value-creation for the funders of MindLab.

Signs of success: The establishment of an active international public sector innovation community (2011).

That the board is starting to see the international engagement and collabroation as an internal value to the ministries (2011).



4 TH GENERATION
2012 – 2013

MINDLAB AS STRATEGIC CHANGE PARTNER

The long-standing ambition of enabling real, strategic partnerships with the owners and other relevant collaborative partners are at the core of MindLab's development in this period. The current board structure is replaced by a more strategic, decision-oriented model with only the permanent secretaries as board members. Along with this change, a new advisory board is formed with international experts from different fields to ensure that MindLab makes the most of its position and possibilities.

The goal is to become a better strategic change partner for the ministries. To pursue this goal, a new work-program structure is built around important challenges and agendas and policy areas in the ministries. In this re-organizing process, the ministry of education is added to the owners of MindLab. At this stage, MindLab also acts proactively to connect the content of the new government platform to the work, methods and research agendas that MindLab – with a human-centered approach – could address in innovative ways.

The internationally-oriented work becomes more strategic in this period. For example, MindLab partners up with international institutions like the UNDP to develop their innovation capacity. And MindLab director Christian Bason advises the President of European Commission José Manuel Barroso on innovation strategy.

GENERIC CHARACTERISTICS

Approach: Making policy innovation labs by using human-centered design for public policy; combining research-based knowledge with user-oriented insight. Strong focus on outcome.

Key challenge: Finding the balance between being an embedded change partner and an autonomous innovation unit.

Signs of succes: Two 1-1 sessions with the minister of education on how to enable human centered implementation (2013).

The launch of a research collabroration with Nesta (2013).

5 TH GENERATION
2014 – 2015

MINDLAB AS DEVELOPER OF CAPACITY

In 2014, MindLab took a strategic step from being cross-ministerial to become 'cross-public', adding the municipality of Odense to the circle of owners. This new formalized partnership with Odense recognized an increasing need for local experimentation.

With the existing owners, MindLabs role had an increasing focus on working systematically with creating change capacity in the ministries to ensure better outcomes from political initiatives. In particular, MindLab takes a critical role in creating a new mindset to policy-making the Ministry of Employment through a mix of activities, research and leadership training.

These efforts were also supported by an explicit research agenda focusing on linking policy and practical outcomes in new ways.

Temporary partnerships with other Danish ministries also became part of the work portfolio. In 2014, a temporary partnership was made with the Ministry of Interior temporary exploring new governance models for more trust-based public service systems. Internationally, MindLab was increasingly involved in setting up innovation labs around the world. This was the latest development in a maturing international movement where human-centered design and public innovation methods are becoming drivers of changing the functionality of government and public administration.

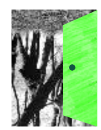
GENERIC CHARACTERISTICS

Approach: System and governance innovation; Applying user-insight to enable systemic change.

Key challenge: The 'us-and-them' problem': Integrating an innovation lab in the core operations of bureaucracy while maintaining a unique position as a radical change agent.

Signs of success: Providing the content and facilitation of the leadership seminar in the Ministry of Employment on new approaches to implementation (2014).

The owners naturally ask for MindLab's input and involvement when they set out to create new strategic agendas for their top-management (2015).



6 TH GENERATION
FROM NOW!

ENABLER OF A NEW PUBLIC SECTOR CULTURE

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