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 our purpose, role, mandate, and future possibilities.

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

The MindLab Team
See more: mindlab/denmark

“The goal is to generate the aspiration for change in our clients. That’s how you break through bureaucracy and create innovation.”
— Christian Bason in Mindlab, 2011

1ST GENERATION
2000 – 2006
MINDLAB AS CREATIVE PLATFORM

2001
The first pilot project, a strategic choice for the future. The first initiatives from Mindlab aimed to create an international competence pool and testing a new methodology for innovation across sector governance.

2005
After having run nearly 200 workshops between 2004 and 2005, the process for Mindlab’s formation unfolded. This set a strategic direction for the future.

2006
The story of the emergence of Mindlab was turned into a new media narrative and testing an online competence pool for innovation across sector governance.

“Mindlab is the equivalent of throwing a grenade at bureaucracy.”
— The First Jutland Windmill and a Mindlab of Ministry of Finance

2ND GENERATION
2007 – 2009
MINDLAB AS USER ORIENTED INNOVATION UNIT

2009
Financial crisis. Actualized reflection on core operations and new ways of developing the public sector.

2010
A “way with the Red Tap” to incorporate cross-ministerial projects.

The first public publication by Christian Bason on “Powering European Public Innovation.” Based on experiences from Mindlab, which becomes an international reference point in the literature on public innovation.

MindLab launches the public sector innovation tool "The Innovation Guide" on an online platform.

“ExPERIENCED legal rights”
Using art as a tool of intervention to challenge existing legal rights and experimenting with the limits of knowledge and decision-making processes.

3RD GENERATION
2010 – 2011
MINDLAB AS CATALYST OF AN INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT

How do innovation practices fit within the existing knowledge practices of the state and simultaneously rethinking the state institution itself?

How do you transform the existing knowledge practices of the state while simultaneously rethinking the state institution itself?“

4TH GENERATION
2012 – 2013
MINDLAB AS STRATEGIC CHANGE PARTNER

2012
Ministry of Education is new partner.

The current public administration is replaced by a new strategic actor with the permission to lead work on future directions. Along with new direction, the role of Mindlab is formed as an international expert on the development of public sector innovation.

“MindLab is the game-changer, the enabler of the cultural change in the public sector.”

5TH GENERATION
2014 – 2016
MINDLAB AS DEVELOPER OF CAPACITY

2014
Ministry of Finance as new partner. Ministry of Employment and Humano Resources are meeting the three Permanent Committees.

2015
Christian Bason leaves Mindlab.

6TH GENERATION
FROM NOW!
ENABLER OF A NEW PUBLIC SECTOR CULTURE

“Mindlab wants to lead a global trend of transforming new insights in human and business reality to solutions, creating a positive change in society.”
—Thomas Prehn, 2015

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, to innovate and disseminate as a culture of practice and leadership.”

Mindlab moves into a strategic role from being cross-ministerial to becoming “cross-public” enabling the municipality of Odense to take the first step, then maybe that is what we need.”
— Christian Bason, Leadership paper, 2010

Christian Bason starts as manager of Mindlab.

New team of 5 hired focused on design and methodology.

The Danish Ministry of Employment becomes part of the partnership of Mindlab.

Right-wing government gets re-elected in Denmark. Mindlab becomes a part of the government’s focus.

“Mindlab works with the owners to create change that leads to the desired impact of citizens, companies and society.”
— Thomas Prehn, 2015

Ministry of Economy and Taxation as an innovation guide on an online platform.

Ministry of Employment as an innovation toolkit "The Practice of Innovation." MindLab launches the public sector innovation tool "The Innovation Guide" on an online platform.

“Danmark as advanced production country”
Strategic cross-ministerial work defining the nature of Denmark’s production policy.

Governance task: “Transparency and sustainable development” - cross-ministerial work defining new governance models for the new knowledge-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 in the United States as a significant moment of emerging community of practice becoming recognized by existing institutional sectors.

“Experience legal rights”
Using art as a tool of intervention to challenge existing legal rights and experimenting with the limits of knowledge and decision-making processes.

Christian Bason in Mindlab, 2012

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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 the heart of the challenge was the ministry’s own culture: it was a large civil service organization, filled with hierarchies and formal procedures. Innovation was seen as something that happened outside the ministry’s doors – in Silicon Valley or among academic institutions.

The ministry’s response was to create a new unit, MindLab. The idea was to bring together experts from various fields to work together on solving complex problems, and to provide a space where innovative ideas could be explored.

In 2007, MindLab was officially launched. Its mission was to “be a catalyst of innovation” – a place where new ideas could be created, tested, and brought to life. The unit was headed by Christian Bason, who had a background in business and entrepreneurship.

Over the years, MindLab has evolved and grown, adapting to the changing needs of its stakeholders. The unit has moved from being a small, cross-ministerial team to a larger, more autonomous organization. MindLab has expanded its focus from being a catalyst of innovation to being a user-oriented innovation unit.

Throughout its journey, MindLab has faced many challenges. It has had to navigate the complexities of the public sector, and to adapt to changing political and social contexts. However, it has also achieved many successes, including the establishment of an international community of practice and the concrete value creation for the funders of MindLab.

MindLab is now a recognized leader in the field of innovation, with a global reputation for excellence in innovation capacity development. Its work has been recognized and supported by a range of international organizations, including the UNDP and the Global Innovation Fund.

In the future, MindLab will continue to adapt and evolve, always looking for new ways to foster innovation in the public sector. The unit’s mission is to be a leader in innovation, a catalyst for change, and a beacon for new approaches to public sector innovation.