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Public sector innovation: Getting everyone on board

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Quick recap

- What is an innovation?
- Why do organizations innovate?
- How do organizations innovate?
- Why is innovation and change challenging?
- How can public servants be mobilized to support innovation and change?



What is a "public sector innovation"?

- A new strategy of delivering public service
- or a new way of production of process and service
- or teaming up with new partners with new ideas
- or new public service concepts
- or new digital forms of interactions with clients
- or new ideas about management, staff involvement and empowerment
- or all of the above



Why do organizations innovate?

- Private businesses that fail to innovate and develop will decline and go out of business. Public organizations will lose legitimacy and trust, leading to eroding willingness to pay taxes and compliance with rules
- External changes; changing and growing expectations on service and flexibility
- Increasing efficiency, cutting costs, bring in modern technology
- Improve human capital in the public service



How do organizations innovate?

- Top-down and bottom-up innovation. Frontline staff are best placed to identify areas for improvement. Bottom-up innovation requires empowering lower-level staff
- Public organizations learn from each other
- Collaboration is key. In Denmark, "79 percent of public sector innovations are carried out in collaboration with one or more external parties, most often with other public sector workplaces" (COI, 2018)



Why is change in organizations challenging?

- Public servants often perceive change as insecure and demanding
- The purpose of change is often not explained to all staff. Macro arguments do not work on the micro level.
- Informal hierarchies and networks in an organization can withstand formal change. Innovation and change could at worst only lead to a de-coupling of rethoric and practice



How can public servants be mobilized in innovation?

- Coercion tends to lead to passive compliance
- Incentives can be efficient but sometimes alter behavior for the wrong reason: "I am not sure why I am doing this but it pays better if I do"
- Staff need to be empowered and made part of the innovation and change process
 - - goal definition and target setting
 - - shared responsibility



Specifically:

- Public servants need to understand and embrace the purpose of innovation and change. "This is what we want to do and what it means to you"
- They need to feel secure about the process and intended outcomes. Innovating towards unemployment is a hard sell
- They need to be empowered and made part of the innovation and change process. This has consequences for management and leadership