CASE STUDY

Spreading Innovation – Denmark

SUMMARY

Many good innovative solutions exist within and across governments, however it is often difficult to systematise the diffusion of innovation because potential innovators have no actual tools to help them replicate good ideas. To overcome this challenge, the National Centre for Public Sector Innovation (COI) in Denmark has developed *Spreading Innovation*,[73] a step-by-step guide to help replicate innovations in new contexts. Launched in 2016, the guide is freely available online. It provides a simplified overview of the innovation process, suggests actions for individual stakeholders, and provides a series of guiding questions that can support dialogue between people who want to share an innovation and people who want to adapt it to a new context. The guide makes it more manageable for governments to work systematically to spread innovation.

73. The guide is written in plain language and is freely available at *http://coi.dk/spreadinginnovation*.

innovation in the public sector, and thereby reducing the risks and costs associated with innovation.

COI designed the guide in three phases over the course of a year. The process involved over 100 people and enjoyed the support of an Advisory Board of handpicked practitioners and researchers.

- **In the 1st phase**, a team of researchers carried out a literature review of processes for diffusion of innovation in government.

- **In the 2nd phase**, the COI conducted field studies in 11 Danish municipalities involved in innovation in the area of welfare technology. Using observation techniques and approaches linked to behavioural economics and "nudge", the COI endeavoured to answer the following question: What happens when institutions spread innovation?

- **In the 3rd phase**, the main findings were tested in other contexts (e.g. business growth immigration services and child care), across all levels of government (central government, local authorities, hospitals, etc.) and even in non-governmental organisations working on welfare innovation.

THE PROBLEM

Innovations are not often spread systematically to other public sector workplaces and remain siloed within the organisations where they were developed. Some innovators fail to realise that their solutions can be usefully applied elsewhere, some lack the means to share their work with a broader audience, and some have no way to discover the innovative work of others.

Traditional methods to communicate innovation, such as awards, ceremonies or databases, play a useful role in spreading ideas, and celebrating and raising awareness about innovation. However, replicating innovations requires changes both to the innovation itself and to the system it will impact. Therefore, the diffusion of innovation is a complex action. Most innovations require adaptation in some form, however there is a lack of information on how to make spreading innovation in the public sector a systematic process.

AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION

In order to break down bureaucratic silos and help governments create new ways of working, COI created the *Spreading Innovation* guide, with the aim of supporting institutions and individuals in the process of replicating

The result of the process was *Spreading Innovation*, a guide deeply anchored in concrete experience and research. It is a tool that supports dialogue between **sharers** (teams who want to share an innovation) and **re-users** (teams that want to replicate an innovation). Although any interested sharer/re-user can download and use the guide independently, the COI firmly believes that personal relationships are essential for innovation and organises networking events to facilitate matching between potential sharers and re-users.

The guide gives an overview of an otherwise complex process. It is structured around six key steps to help government officials share and reuse an innovation (as shown in Appendix IV). For each of these steps, there is a checklist of proposed actions to take and questions in the form of dialogue tools to guide discussions between teams. This approach enables the *Spreading Innovation* guide to support the spreading of innovations in

government, while respecting institutional conditions that may require reinvention or re-contextualisation of some aspects of innovation processes – for example, taking into account the complexities that can exist between municipal, regional and state workplaces.

NOVELTY

A study across the Danish public sector published by COI in 24 October 2016 showed that almost 80% of innovations are carried out in collaboration with external partners, and that over 70% of innovations are directly copied or inspired by other people's solutions. The COI identified an opportunity here to accelerate the rate of innovation by facilitating dialogue between sharers and re-users. The *Spreading Innovation* guide became a first attempt to facilitate this dialogue and help systematise this new way of working in government.

IMPACT AND RESULTS

Replicating innovations with the support of experienced people is expected to facilitate the process and reduce the costs associated with innovations. To test the hands-on application of the guide and iteratively improve on it, the COI is currently supporting two teams in the replication of an innovation. One of these teams is the Roskilde Municipality, which is sharing its experience on creating a better system to address citizens' complaints with NaturErhvervsstyrelsen, the Danish Agrifish Agency. Both institutions met during a networking event hosted by the COI in late 2015, and are now finalising the first step of the guide in collaboration with the COI.

Using the guide has a clear benefit for replicators as it simplifies their innovation process, but sharer institutions also have an opportunity to build a structured approach to their initiative. A Spreading Innovation participant stated that, "By sharing our innovation with another institution, we revisited our own project and saw it under a different light. It allowed us to rediscover knowledge that was inside our institution, and it showed us the potential to scale up the initial innovation".

REPLICABILITY

The core purpose of the *Spreading Innovation* guide is the replicability of innovation in government. It was designed as a flexible solution to facilitate dialogue around innovation processes, in order to improve the replicability of innovations and develop ways of working in government, based on better dialogue and collaboration across departments.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The main challenge in designing the *Spreading Innovation* guide was bringing together field experience and academic research on the diffusion of innovation in government. One of the ways found to address this challenge was to bring both communities together in the form of the Spreading Innovation Advisory Board, however field experience was also incorporated through the observation of innovation processes at municipal level. Once the knowledge base was established, COI aimed to produce a guide useful for other policy areas and levels of government, and had to undertake substantive work to simplify and test it in different contexts.

Currently, an important element to the success of the *Spreading Innovation* guide is institution matching. To achieve this objective, COI organises networking events for its large audience. Embedding innovation in government implies that knowledge and know-how cannot just be delegated to outsiders. This is why networking events that bring people together are as important to spreading innovation as the guide itself.

SPREADING **INNOVATION**
CHECK TEST ADAPT REMOVE IMPLEMENT HARVEST

– A GUIDE AND DIALOGUE TOOL