

Change Makers Network

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Organisation: Government of Finland

Country: Finland

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services

Type: Human Resources, Organisational Design

Launched in: 2013

Overall development time: 2 year(s)

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Description

The Change Makers Network is a loosely organized and self-directing team of experts from different ministries, with different backgrounds, education and expertise. What is shared within the participants is need and will to build up a working culture based on a “whole of government” - mind set and “crossing the silos” - ways of working.

The network is also willing to test and adopt modern, explorative and digital ways of working. Participants are all volunteers, and not nominated to represent any particular point of view or ministry in the network. The network-model differs dramatically from the tradition where a working group or committee is set and participants are nominated to fulfill a particular, often elsewhere set target.

Change Makers Network is a new kind of a bottom-up community or “movement,” which crosses the boundaries of all kinds: administrative, professional, attitudinal etc. It also strongly challenges traditional, hierarchical management practices as well as old-fashioned human resource management practices. Management practices as well as administrative services should all be seen as enabling the renewal, instead of setting obstacles for change.

Change Makers Network’s unofficial mission statement is “Finland first”. Only after that comes the sectoral approach. Through this mission statement, the network strongly stresses the need and will to work across ministerial boundaries and silos in order to be able to solve problems in Finnish society.

In practice, the mission statement is being implemented by building up a new kind of working culture in many different ways: by common discussions, supporting and launching new initiatives, writing blogs, giving expert statements, starting new experiments as well as supporting and bringing innovative approaches in to preparation of all new issues and projects. Most recently the network has been working with the theme “Government /State as an Enabler”.

Why the innovation was developed

- It has long been recognized in various quarters that ministries remain too detached and isolated from one another, without sufficient coordination and cooperation.
 - At the same time, the challenges and problems faced by our society cut across all boundaries – attitudinal, professional and especially administrative boundaries.
 - Yet we have the chances as well as the skills and competencies and indeed the obligation to work more cost effectively, to facilitate innovations and to motivate people working in the preparation of matters.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality

- The Change Makers Network aims to empower and activate the personnel to make the change, and be a subject instead of object motivates the network members to question and act.
 - The network encourages to new informal cross-ministerial ways of working to help enable resource fluidity in every sense.
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Main beneficiaries

Government bodies, Government staff

- Public Servants
- Government
- Citizens

Results

Service quality

Responsiveness:

- The Change Makers Network is an unofficial but serious player in building up innovation capacity in the ministries, as well as improving the flexibility and responsiveness of the public administrations in wider sense.

Development

Design

Time pressure, dwindling resources and the sheer scale of the problems facing Finland's government are risks for doing things in a way we are used to. On the other hand, these challenges strongly reinforce the fact that we have to change course and do it as quickly as possible.

From an organisational perspective the most critical questions are: Have we (here: ministries) set aside enough time for innovation and the development of new directions and approaches? Are we truly willing to invest enough time and expertise in creating the conditions and the kind of management culture where people are inspired to exchange ideas and to work together?

Matters under ministerial preparation today are becoming increasingly complex and interwoven. Decision-making on social reforms, therefore, requires a broad and inclusive approach. It's necessary to work more closely as a team, to have tentacles in every direction in order to identify modern-day phenomena and to find the most appropriate solutions.

Indeed it is our understanding that in implementing government strategies, ministries need to take an agile and smart approach that cuts across administrative boundaries, that makes it easier to link up with other relevant stakeholders in society, and that makes the best possible use of their wide range of skills and expertise.

Testing

- No methods were used to test the innovation.

Challenges and solutions

- Excessive rigidity creates poor performance and inefficiencies, and new and alternative ideas become buried under the weight of established practices. This is also liable to deter the development and introduction of alternative approaches.
- It is said that culture eats strategies for breakfast. Culture does not change by itself. Cooperation, collaboration, giving and sharing are elements that must be systematically enhanced at all levels: structural, operational and attitudinal.
- This does not mean that every ministry or individual civil servant should agree on every matter. In their processes of political preparation, it is crucial that ministries retain sufficient independence, and they must be able to consider even contradictory and rival solutions. It's important to be able to boldly try out new and different practices and approaches.
- By a stronger emphasis on cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration, it is also possible to significantly add flexibility to remove resources within the Government.
- Approaching from different perspectives also improves ability to sense and predict future changes. Dependence on one single point of view, person or just one type of skills and competencies is highly fragile in many ways.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Members of the Change Makers Network believe that ministries could still achieve much more by facilitating and encouraging the integration of skills and competencies in the spirit of 'Team Finland'. Acting and working together ministries could achieve much more effective outputs with the taxpayer money at their disposal.
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Conditions for success

- The introduction of new, agile approaches to administrative preparation challenges our existing institutional and management culture as well as the traditional ways of doing things in ministries and public administration. Traditional cultures and practices are firmly grounded in formal appointments of task forces and working groups and the principle of quota representation.
 - Since prevailing practices of preparation are deeply rooted in this kind of culture, it is crucial that political leaders and senior civil servants lend their weight to supporting new practices and send out the message that even less formal and more experimental approaches are permitted and even encouraged.
 - In future, it is essential that while being an informal and "not nominated", nor organised group of actives, people's passion to change and explore is increasingly utilized in all of the ministries. Strong support from top executives is critical also in the future.
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Other information

The biggest value of the Change Makers Network lies in its unofficial character. At the same time, this is the most challenging factor while keeping the network alive. However, the future of the network seems positive. The Change Makers Network is already highly-recognized and its informal and unofficial nature is accepted.

It has gradually taken "to the tables" where decisions are being made; either as a network or through its members representing new, open- and broad-minded members.

The future of the network is connected to following themes and actions: getting rid of unnecessary resistance to the culture of creating new approaches and ostensible efficiency, from planning to quick experiments, taking advantage of the power of networks and the wisdom of crowds, with common objectives to common activities.

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