

Learning network about innovation in government

"Spring uit de band" (jump wild, become crazy)

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Organisation: The administration of Flanders: Agency for government personnel

Country: Belgium

Level of government: Regional/State government

Sector: General public services

Type: Human Resources, Organisational Design

Launched in: 2011

Overall development time:

33 months

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The innovation learning network aims to coach innovative projects, and to create an environment where civil servants can help and learn from each other to become better in the innovation processes.

The innovation learning programme wants to create a more innovative climate in government where civil servants are passionate and courageous, using their talents in an excellent way to innovate the administration. The participants (civil servants from different government organisations) are encouraged to become better in understanding the goals of government and society, management incentives, recognising restrictive patterns, co-creation with all kinds of stakeholders, encouraging passion, multidisciplinary working, following trends and getting things done in a shorter time frame.

The innovation is about the innovation process that we install in the administrations. The innovation learning programme does not take over the responsibility of the innovation projects themselves. The innovation programme helps civil servants from all kinds of government agencies work together and learn from each other.

Why the innovation was developed

Civil society expects better service quality and savings. The Flemish Government asks the administration to do better with less means. The Minister of administrative affairs wants to encourage the government agencies to be more innovative in their services, and has set up a programme for more efficiency and effectiveness. Also, HR strategy makes talent management a priority. In addition, to encourage innovation we used to organise an innovation contest. This has not created an innovative environment. Innovative civil servants have been interviewed to ask how innovation could be stimulated. They considered that innovative projects should be supported by coaching and knowledge sharing.

Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve effectiveness, Improve service quality

- Boost innovation in Flemish government agencies.
 - Deliver better services making use of the talents of our civil servants; listen better to the citizens and society; create solutions that are useful.
 - More efficient and effective solutions for innovative projects.
 - Encourage government agencies to co-create government service solutions with the users.
 - Boost the talents of civil servants when innovating.
 - It's a priority for the government of Flanders to create a more innovative climate among government agencies, and highly motivated and passionate civil servants.
 - Coach the participants of the programme to understand the political priorities.
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Main beneficiaries

Government bodies, Government staff

- The learning network works at the moment in 14 government organisations, with 20 projects and about 50 civil servants.
- The aim is to make a network of civil servants who help each other in innovation. The participants should be able to start learning with other colleagues in government.
- The government agencies involved have their offices in Brussels and Mechelen and they all work in the Flanders region.
- All government agencies in Flanders/Belgium can access the programme.

Results

Efficiency

Programme provides coaching for a group of civil servants which is more efficient than individual coaching. Civil servants help each other in using the methods and techniques (no consultancy needed).

Effectiveness

Programme provides coaching for a group of civil servants to make them more effective. Knowledge sharing is done by civil servants themselves. Co-creation is an important element. The participants challenge each other to do better and work more efficiently and more effectively.

Service quality

Accessibility:

Instead of giving an award to some innovative administrations, the programme really helps civil servants to boost innovation. External advisors are invited to inspire and get the participants becoming more creative and overcoming the restrictions they face.

Responsiveness:

Participants have impact on the quality of the programme as it provides help on demand. It is a very interactive learning programme.

Other:

Instead of giving an award to some innovative administrations, the programme really helps civil servants to boost innovation. External advisors are invited to inspire and get the participants becoming more creative and overcoming the restrictions they face.

Some projects coached by the programme:

- Put chain processes in place in the waste industry to create less waste (and not just recycle).
 - Use social media in communication with citizens (in public works, spatial planning etc.).
 - Modernisation of legislation.
 - School game for recruitment in maritime sector.
 - Create process knowledge by civil servants and give civil servants more responsibility in the way they work (together).
 - Create a virtual brainstorming place for civil servants.
 - Create open communication channels with citizens, companies and society, brainstorm with users.
 - Implement tailor-made solutions by co-creation.
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User satisfaction

Co-creation is encouraged by the programme. The programme provides knowledge and inspiration to the civil servants. Networking is also a very important aspect. All participants say they are more enthusiastic and courageous in their work thanks to the meetings with peer colleagues provided by the programme.

Evaluation

Ex-ante: Only the costs have been calculated before. We were convinced that a boost of innovative thinking is necessary. Each project in the programme has its own business case. Some are very detailed, some are not. The standard business case model theories are used.

Ex-post: The main outputs of the evaluation process are guidelines for the future and recommendations to the management and political level. A crowd sourcing tool was used to collect the evaluation results and the ideas for improvement. Opinions were written down in the tool by participants or by the programme manager, as results from evaluation interviews. The programme leader has individual interviews with everyone to come to a real and useful evaluation. Out of the evaluation, a charter of innovative civil servants has been written and has been signed by government management.

<http://innovatie.v-ict-or.be/informatie/charter-van-innoverende-ambtenaren-met-10-klimaatregels-voor-innovatie>

Development

Design

The agreement to make up a learning innovation programme instead of the existing innovation contest came up after interviews with key persons in the government administrations of Flanders, known as inspiring and innovative people.

Some consultants in innovation processes were also involved.

Design time: 12 months

Testing

To get a better understanding of the needs of possible participants in the innovation learning programme, we organised a workshop with candidate participants as a trial of possibilities that could be included in the learning programme. The participants were recruited by an open call within the government agencies.

Testing time: 3 months

Implementation

Tools used:

Procedures and tools used for one year of the innovation programme:

- Start-up weekend.
- 4 meeting days for workshop.
- Social media.
- Website.
- Coaching interviews (3 per project group).
- Innovation festival to share lessons learned about the innovation process.
- Crowd sourcing tool to collect ideas on innovation processes.

Resources used:

For needs assessment:

- EUR 30 000 of consultancy.
- 1 FTE (full-time equivalent) own personnel.

For the conceptualisation/ testing:

- EUR 10 000 euros for consultancy in the innovation process.

For the Implementation:

- 1 administrative person ¼ FTE.
- 1 assistant of programme leader ¼ FTE.
- 1 programme leader 1/5 FTE.
- 1 consultant (20 days).
- 20 project teams.
- External thinkers from all kinds of disciplines (also government managers).

In total:

- 50 days of consultancy in innovation processes.
- EUR 20 000 website and crowdsourcing tool.
- 2.5 FTE own personnel.
- People that could inspire us were invited to have debates with us to boost our creativity.

Implementation time: 18 months

Diffusion

We created a network of ‘jumpers’ that keeps the learning programme moving. To achieve scaling and diffusion of the innovation, we brainstormed with the project teams, created a talent database, a brainstorming platform and used all techniques and methods learned in the programme itself. The network exists since the end of 2011. We are mainstreaming the programme at the moment by reshaping it in a network of civil servants who show self leadership. Participants are very enthusiastic and say the programme makes a difference in their attitude and work results. They want to go on with the learning innovation programme with more civil servants and more government organisations. The programme aims to work with all government agencies of the Flemish government and also with agencies from local and Belgian government. Today we already work with 1 federal and 1 local government organisation, and with some 13 Flemish government agencies.

Diffusion time: still ongoing

Challenges and solutions

- Get the involvement of all agencies.
 - Solution: Co-creation with key persons of all government agencies.
- Find an interesting group of candidates to test the workshops, make up a good workshop.
 - Solution: Networks used. Speak at steering committees of these networks to explain the goal of the programme. Have an open attitude.
- Get the project teams involved in the programme.
 - Solution: individual interviews and offer that they can create it themselves
- Get the project teams sharing their knowledge on social media of other systems.
 - Solution: to tackle in a more global way, i.e. knowledge sharing platform for all disciplines (now the offer of knowledge systems is too diverse).
- Get management involved:
 - Solution: marketing. And go slow with management.

Challenge for the diffusion:

- Need of policy or guideline to assure civil servants can invest in the network of “jumpers” and make each other jump higher!
 - Asking time for evaluation.
 - Solution: The programme leader has individual interviews with everyone to come to a real and useful evaluation.
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Partnerships

Consultancy in innovation processes for all stages and stakeholders of innovation projects

Private sector

Belgian government and local governments

Other Public Sector

The aim is to work closer with the Belgian government in scaling and diffusion, and also with local governments.

All government agencies can be involved in the learning programme in every stage.

Service users and inspirators from all kind of disciplines

Other

Service users of project teams (only few involved) in implementation and adoption

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Interactivity works.
- Passion gives passion.
- Choose your battles.
- Networking is very important. Make relations with other initiatives.
- Involve other government levels.
- Try and fall, and stand up again, show your weaknesses.
- Involve everyone who wants to work with you.
- Be open to feedback and change approach to fit the needs of the participants.

Things to change:

- Involve the users of government services more actively.
- Blog, communicate more about the effects.

Advice:

- Contact us. Work together with us. Let us create a network over boundaries and learn from each other how to innovate in government services.
 - Work with volunteers. Better to start with a few participants.
 - Be open to everyone. Don't decide for other agencies whether their innovation initiative is really innovative. Just help them to become more innovative.
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Conditions for success

- Political support.
 - Leadership of Government Management, with belief in the added value of innovation.
 - Enthusiasm of civil servants.
 - Innovation goals incorporated in the daily tasks of civil servants.
 - Networking possibilities for civil servants.
 - Co-creation with private sector.
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Other information

Innovation is not just a culture. It is a time consuming job. It takes time to do it right.

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