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Kommune

Cross-Department Co-Design Playbook

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Introduction

Why is it necessary to encourage cross-departmental co-design in the public sector?

Because as problems increase in complexity and more and more services are delivered across the public organization, we are often faced with the shortcomings of subject-matter-expertise or "mono-competency".

For a specific problem, we need mono-competency. But when problems begin to manifest across an organization, every mono-departmental response will feel frustrating and ultimately be futile.

This playbook helps you find the right problem to work on.

This is a process first devised in a municipal setting, but it would work in any large organization, because power and pride begin to sieve into the cracks of the silos.

Cross-department co-design entails the giving up of power, and to see your own role in something bigger, rather than controlling a whole (like one's own department)

But we are often not trained in sensing and putting these issues into words in a cross-departmental manner.

In Fredericia municipality we have had good experiences deploying a cross-departmental co-design process, and we are happy to be able to share it more widely in this guidebook.

We have gone through this process, when we developed and implemented one of the most comprehensive municipal service innovation projects in Denmark to date, Trivsel+.

You can read more about this in the case study.

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Purpose

The purpose of this playbook is to provide a learning resource for public servants to help them work together across their organization, and better frame the problems they should tackle.

The playbook provides worksheets for some of the generalizable steps in the process, but leaves the more project specific phases up to the users.

The playbook does not go into detail about the "design phase", where you actually come up with ideas for solutions. The design phase is already thoroughly described in numerous publications and should be chosen with regard to your specific problem..

The methods in this playbook helps connect people and teams across the organization, before we try to make any innovation or implement a change.

We hope the reader can find inspiration in our work.

Who is this playbook for?

This playbook is made for anyone working in a public sector organization, who has a feeling that they are facing problems that cross organizational barriers.

This would typically be a manager, leader or head of office.

Note

The initiator of this process will not necessarily be the final project owner. This is an important point about working across departments.

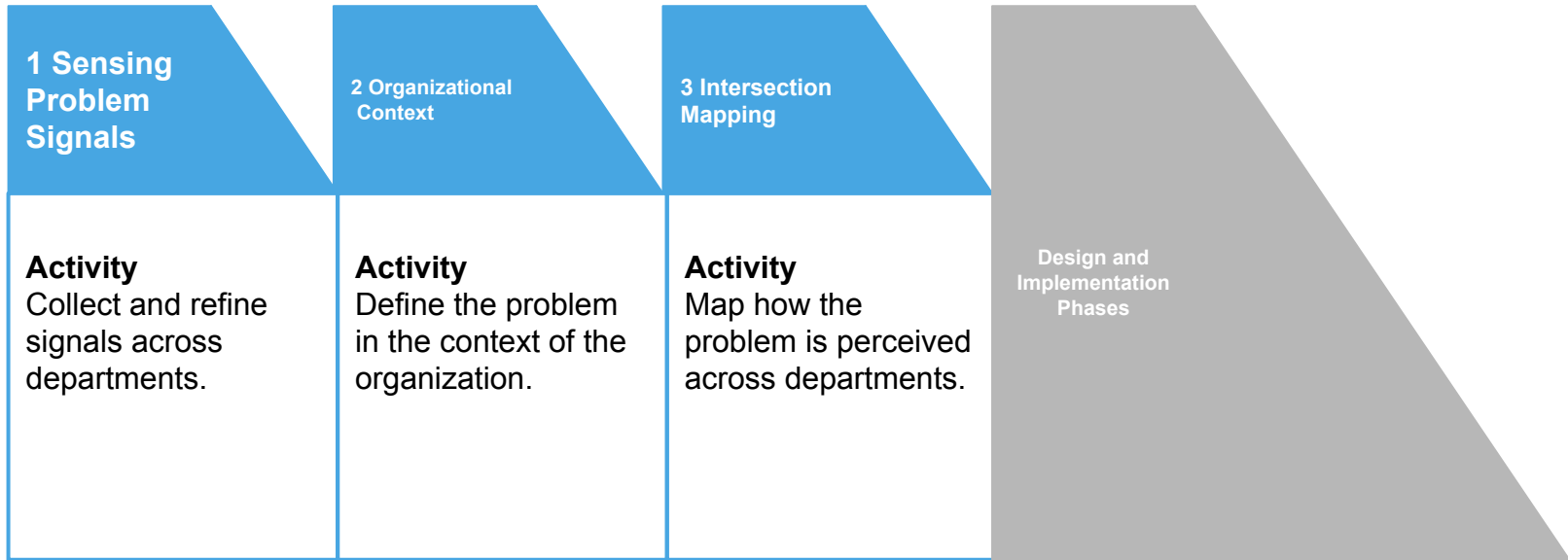**Fredericia Kommune**
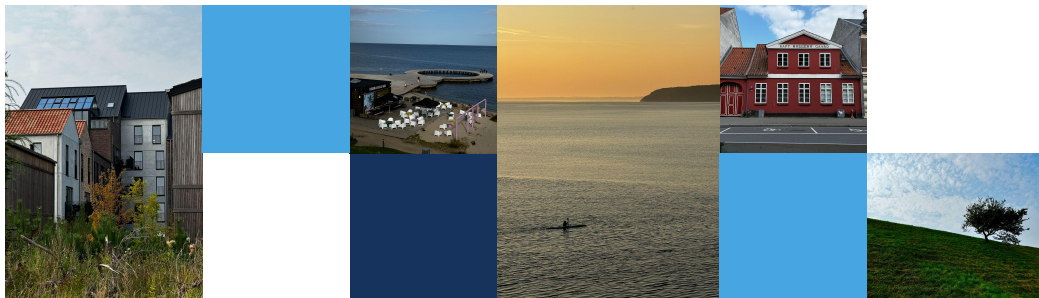
Process Overview

Process Overview

The process we outline in this playbook will take you from sensing a signal - something you feel is a problem, that might have implications in other departments as well - to mapping the experience of a fundamental problem to your organization.
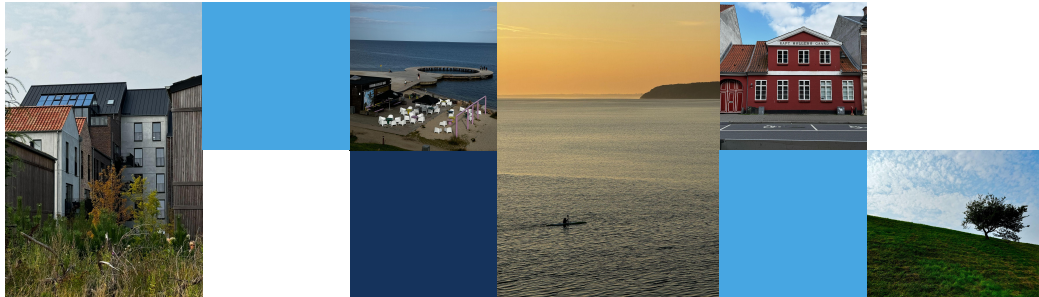
The playbook outlines activities for the first 3 steps. The rest of the process is problem specific, but we feel it is still worth mentioning how we went about them, in the hope that our principles can help others.

The final steps not covered, are the **design and test systematically**, **impact measurement**, and **implement for real change.**

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Process Overview

1 Sensing Problem Signals

Activity
Collect and refine signals across departments.

2 Organizational Context

Activity
Define the problem in the context of the organization.

3 Intersection Mapping

Activity
Map how the problem is perceived across departments.

Design and Implementation Phases

Steps

1 Sensing
Problem Signals

1

Sensing Problem Signals

Main points

Purpose

This phase is all about sensing problems across departments.

Participants

Leaders from different departments

You Know You're Done When...

You're only hearing stories that match your own story of the problem, and they share the core of your own story.

Explanation

What sets this phase apart from other innovation methodologies we have tried, is that problems are typically only identified and dealt with on a departmental level.

Innovation methodologies often only help the single-department intervention to be better.

In our experience, by having a first step that actively encourages managers to think about their problems cross-departmentally, is not only good for addressing the underlying problems better, but also a good exercise for the organization.

1

Problem Signal

Explanation Continued

The basic idea behind the activity in this phase is **story**. Furthermore, the activity should always be **bilateral**, and not be set up as a workshop.

The idea is to formulate the story of the problem you see as a change-agent, and then confirm that bilaterally with leaders across your organization.

It is not about negotiation or explaining, but about working narratively. Be curious, and listen for what is important to others, while reflecting on what the important details are of your own story.

If you do not do this validation of stories from the real world, you risk starting to work on imagined and not real problems.

By validating your narrative across the organization, you build social capital and trust, which is essential going forward. Also, the validation ensures relevance to cross-departmental expertise, which increases the potential for wider change in the end.

The narrative must be linked to the situation on the ground, because people in leadership rarely get these stories. They are often too filtered to act on, when they reach the top. Top management get tendencies, not narratives.

Problem Signals

Worksheet

1 The initiator sits by themselves and construct the story of the problem they see. Use narrative tools like character and plot to help tell it so others will listen and see the point.

2 The setup is the human backstory of the problem. The conflict is where the essence of the problem is revealed, that everyone naturally reacts negatively to. The status is where that leaves you/us now.

3 Practice the story, and tell it **bilaterally** to peers and leaders.

Setup	Conflict	Status

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2 Organizational Context

2

Organizational Context

Main points

Purpose

To clearly identify the organizational context of the problem as a whole.

Participants

Leaders from different departments (probably same as ones in phase 1)

You Know You're Done When...

When you are able to describe a problem that goes across departments, and is unavoidable if the organization wants to persist or grow.

Explanation

This phase helps participants clearly situate their problems in the necessary organizational context, to move beyond their own departments. It is about **motivation** and **preparation** of the organization.

This phase is important, because it clarifies the common ground found in the first phase. It is essential to clearly identify, and put into words, the problem in a way that leaves no room for misunderstanding that the problem is fundamental to the organization.

This is different from other innovation methodologies, because it insists on a rigorous problem identification and clarification across departments.

2

Organizational Context

Instructions

This phase is all about creating a sense of urgency, and making clear **that** you are on to something viz. the validated narrative.

The point of this phase is to get people to agree on the **why** of moving on this problem. They might disagree on the how, but this is not important here.

Everyone experiences involvement, but should not be allowed to decide anything.

Insist on staying close to the practical realities of the problem, as validated in the narrative.

1 Validate the problem against qualitative data, to ensure severity of the problem.

2 Gather leaders with real decision mandate in their departments, and present problem through story and data.

3 Consider escalating up the hierarchy, to get top management buy-in.

3 Intersection Mapping

3

Intersection Mapping

Main points

Purpose

Validate that the organizational problem is real and felt with a significant portion of the organization on all levels.

Participants

Depending on the size of the organization, up to several 100 people. Reference the ladder of participation.

You Know You're Done When...

Everyone can see the problem as it manifests across the organization.

Explanation

You examine the organizational problem by mapping it across the organization on different levels and in different subject-matter-areas (mono-competencies).

This phase is crucial, because it forces the process and participants away from their every day focus, and adds the perspective of everyone affected by the problem. This also includes giving voice to people in the organization, who may have first hand experience with the problem, but are not typically included in problem-identification work.

This will give the team a nuanced view of the organizational problem, and provide hints of how it might be meaningfully addressed.

3
Intersection Mapping

Instructions

Note

The size of the boxes in the worksheet represent the amount of people you will probably get insights from at each level.

1. Write the fundamental problem in the top. Then, Identify the different organizational levels you can examine the problem from.

2. Gather insights into how the problem is experienced across the organization. This could be done with a mix of methods like interviews, surveys and observations.

3. Synthesize the insights into the framework, so you have a big picture of how the fundamental problem is experienced.
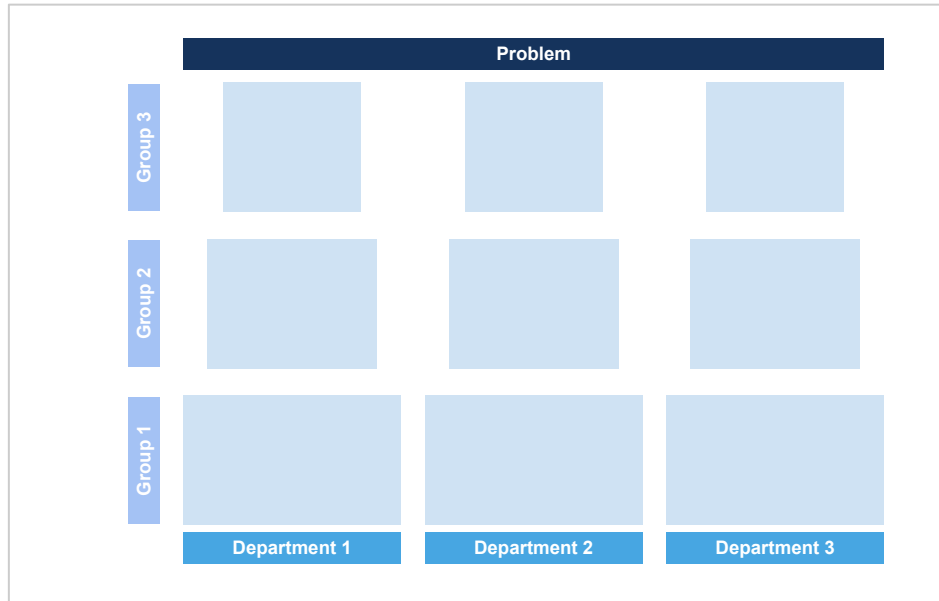
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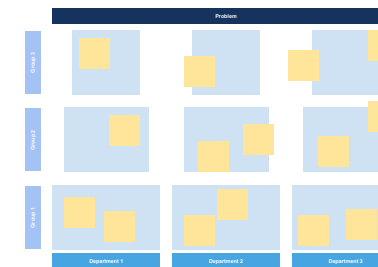
Intersection Mapping

Worksheet

The worksheet is a guide. Please consider using a larger canvas like a whiteboard, a wall or an online tool, to manage inputs.

	Problem		
Group 3			
Group 2			
Group 1			
	Department 1	Department 2	Department 3

Outcomes so far

Outcomes so far

By going through the process so far, you will have achieved the following:

- Clarity around the nature of the problem
- A common language around the fundamental problem
- A path for different subject-matter-areas to contribute to a cross-departmental problem.

If you tie these things up in a report, it will be very hard to say no to undertaking a development process on the basis of it, simply because it has been validated and told as a story, and because the problem is proven to go across the organization.

It is a real problem, so it will be easier to find real solutions!

Good luck.

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