
Innovation Agents in Danish Healthy Cities Network

The Danish Healthy Cities Network involves at the moment 70 innovation agents in the project “Network for Innovation Agents”. The purpose is to start up small innovative projects, and to learn how an innovative approach can lead to new ways of doing things, new partnerships and ultimately benefit the citizens’ health and well-being. The project is about innovation, not directly about health! Innovation means that you have to *not* know what is on the other side. It is about daring, and this is what the innovation agents is challenged on in this project.

The focus is on the processes of how to do innovation. The network for innovation agents meets four days over six month, and the meetings are formed as workshops and action learning days. This means, that every time the network get together the plan is to get even further in the project. The 70 innovation agents comes from 28 municipalities/cities in Denmark, both members and non-members of the Danish Healthy Cities Network.

In the project we work with four rules:

- Take the personal leadership for the project
- “Just do it”! Work with a prototype of your project, and if it works, make it bigger next time
- Work together cross-sectorial. Work with whom ever is interested: if the persons really dedicated to the project, let the engagement and passion be shown – and make others interested through this
- Innovation despite of management and planning – the projects’ scale must be “under the radar”

The national agenda for the project is the publishing of 12 theme-based prevention-recommendations (e.g. alcohol, physical activity, nutrition, mental health, sun) by the Danish National Board of Health in 2012-2013. This knowledge-based tool for municipalities is published to help local governments to prioritize and develop the quality of the work within primary prevention. These recommendations are used as the case to work the innovative way, and it was required that the participants before entering the project, pointed out which theme and which recommendation (there are around 300 recommendations to choose from), they would be working with in the project. When the Network for Innovation Agents began some projects involved already staff from cross-sectors of the municipality, others innovation agents started alone. But during the six month it is the idea that all projects involve staff from a cross the municipality.

The innovation-tool used in the project is the NABC-method from Standford University: N = Need, A = Approach, B = Benefit, C = Competition. Meaning to make it clear what the need for the project is, how this need is shown, which benefits will this project produce and are other projects in competition with this project? This altogether leaves the innovation agents with an “elevator-speech” that precisely sums up the project. Next step is to how to involve the relevant partners, how to deliver the idea. So the Network for Innovation Agents focuses on the agents’ leadership, and day two gave them ideas to take the lead and involve the right persons cross-sectorial. This is important because they experiment with new ways of working, new partners and new colleagues.

Part of the ambition with the project is also to show the participants the value of networking. Too many make the same inventions, too many start too often with Adam and Eve, too many are maybe too proud to ask for help and get out of the comfort zone. So pitching the project and getting feedback has shown it self almost ridiculously valuable and important.

The Network for Innovation Agents is financially supported by the Ministry of Health as a way to promote Health in All Policies, an overall agenda within the Healthy Cities Network and necessary within the Danish context.