Mathis Schulte & Marc Thompson

The Laborisation of Change: What is it with Labs and Change these days?

Labs, Labs, everywhere…..

POLICY INNOVATION LAB

SOCIAL LABS

The Lab
The Global Innovation Lab for Climate Finance

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS RESEARCH LABS

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
Sydney Policy Lab

ARSENAL INNOVATION LAB

BE A { LEARNER. CHANGE-MAKER. LEADER.
social innovationlab
the future of our collective work

FUTURE OF WORK LAB

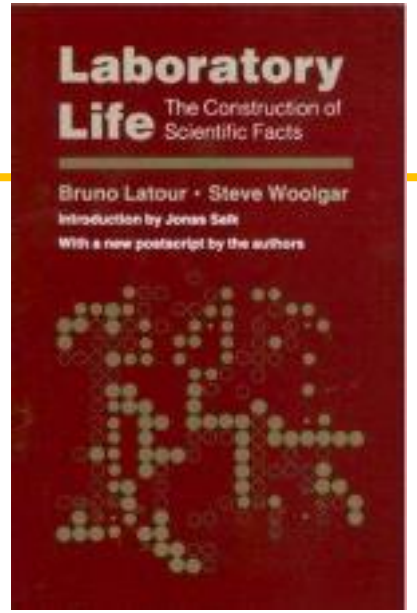
ipl immigrati policy lab
Stanford | Zurich

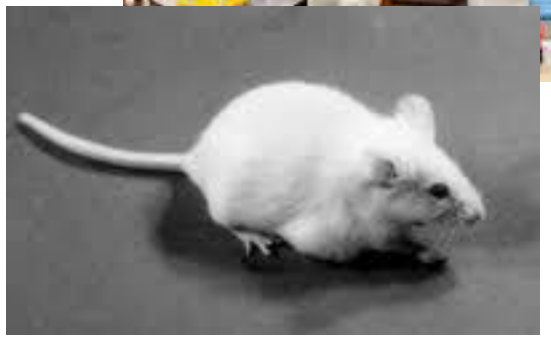
The Leadership Laboratory

the change leaders

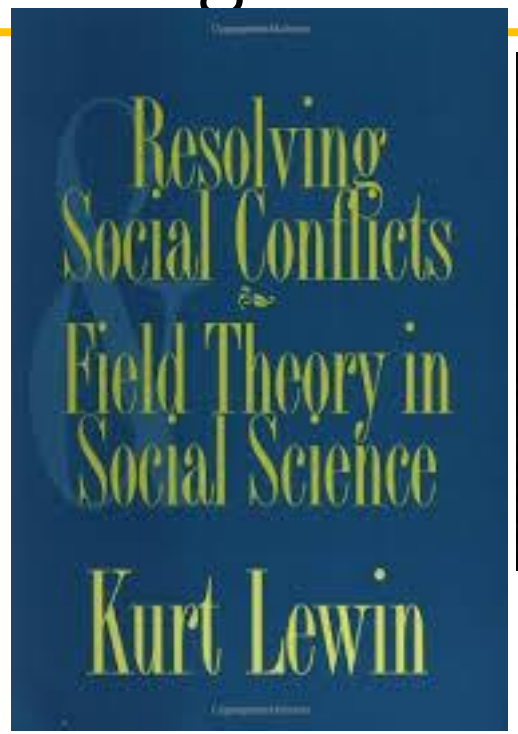
CONNECT / CREATE / CHALLENGE

Scientific labs



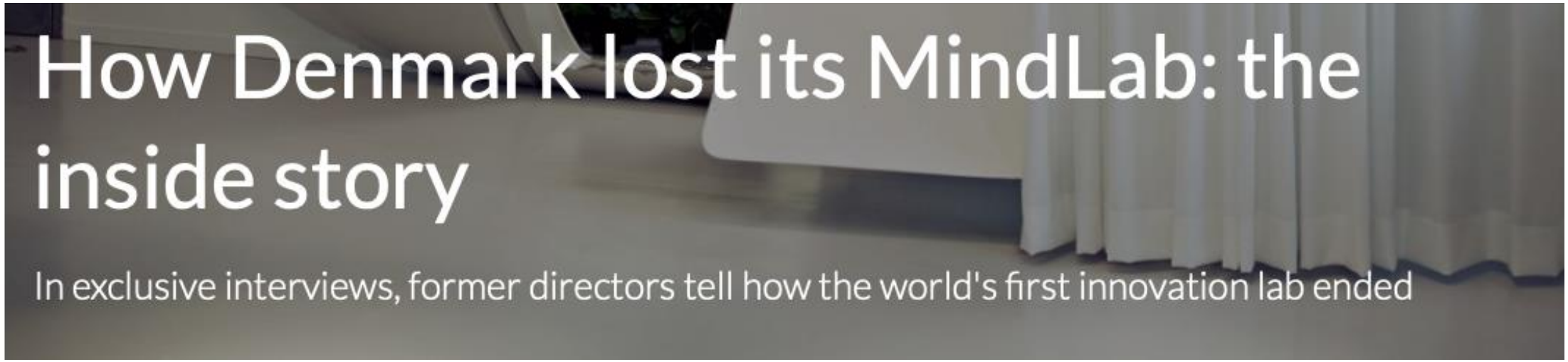


In the beginning…Lewin's policy lab



Modern labs – brought to you by Vitra and 3M

Laboratory life…..



- ‘…to the observer from the outside world, the laboratory displays itself as a site of action from which ‘nature’ is as much as possible excluded rather than included.” (Knorr-Cetina, 1995)
- Labs are sites for ‘consequence free research’
- Labs offer the possibility of containment of an experiment – it will not have real-world consequences and is reversible.
- Labs are sites of provisional, contested and emergent knowledge.

Labs and Field Theory

- ‘one of the foremost tasks of fact-finding and observation in social psychology is to supply reliable data about those properties of the field as a whole’ (Lewin, 1939)
- ‘we need a positive means of bringing these various types of facts together in such a way that one can treat them on one level without sacrificing the recognition of their specific characteristics’ (Lewin, 1939)

Two cases

Urban Transition Lab: Montreuil	GE Appliance builds an innovation lab
• Montreuil's left-green coalition wants to reduce waste and move to a circular economy • University led Lab enrolls businesses, local government, NGOs, social movements and citizens to work on challenge • Deep changes in business models, practices, behaviours and mindsets required • Severe financial pressures and limited resources are available to sustain the Lab • Right wing populist opposition fears job losses and more costly services hitting their voters pockets	• GE's investors are risk-averse which does not allow for bold innovations. • Career advancement at GE avoids conspicuous failures while inventors must fail repeatedly. • GE can serve only mainstream customers but cannot reach early adaptors who are willing to pay a premium for risky product.
How can Montreuil sustain its Lab approach to sustainability?	How can GE use a lab approach to overcome the drawbacks of being a large and established company?

Evaluating labs – what criteria?

(1) Rationale and theoretical foundation

(2) Experimentation

(3) Boundaries

(4) Collaboration

(5) Organisation and process control

(6) Temporality

(1) Rationale and theoretical foundation

- Many labs are based on untested assumptions about innovation, learning, and collaboration, including…
  - Flashy design spurs creativity
  - Open spaces create an open mind and foster collaboration
  - Flexible workspaces induce mental flexibility
  - Hierarchy and role differentiation stifle innovation
  - The concrete is better than the abstract
  - "Traction through action! Overthinking is stinking."

What are the assumptions about what makes a lab effective?
How are the assumptions tested? Are they challenged?

(1) Rationale and Theoretical Foundation

Living Labs:

"a means of sourcing ideas and/or capabilities (Westerlund and Leminen, 2011) and living labs as a means of collaboration amongst stakeholders at a more formative stage of the innovation process (Leminen et al., 2014; Leminen et al., 2016)"

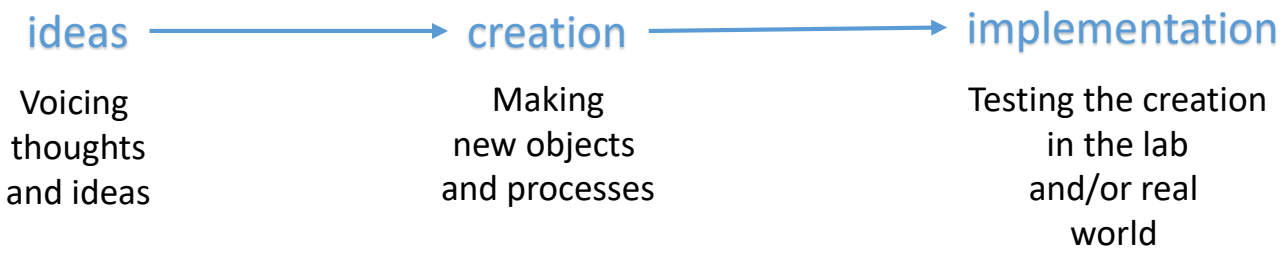
'urban living labs' deal specifically with grand challenges such as sustainability, decarbonisation and environmental issues, taking the city as the experimental space.

Collaborative learning focus

(2) Experimentation

Experimentation:

Safeguarding against failure by legitimizing trial and error



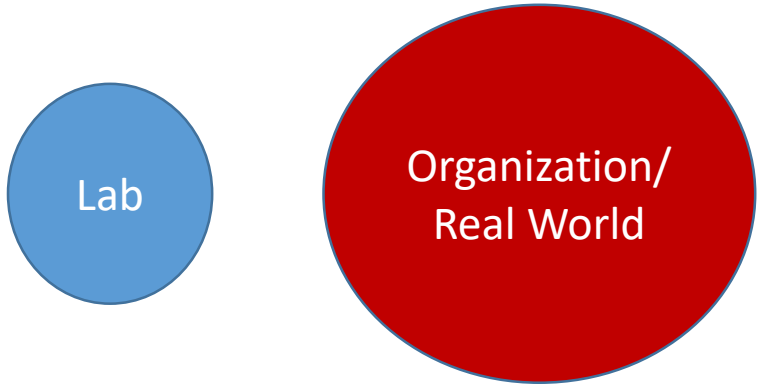
Where - and to what extent - does experimentation take place?

(2) Experimentation

Experimentation approaches in the lab?

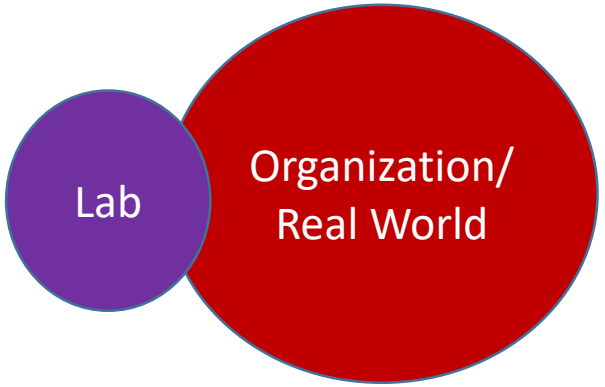
- niche experiments
- bounded socio-technical experiments
- transition experiments
- sustainability experiments, and
- grassroots experiments.

(3) Boundaries



High boundaries

- Strong protection against the real world
- Strong protection against the lab
- High differentiation
- High transfer costs
- Low risk
- E.g., BMW ‘fortresses of innovation’

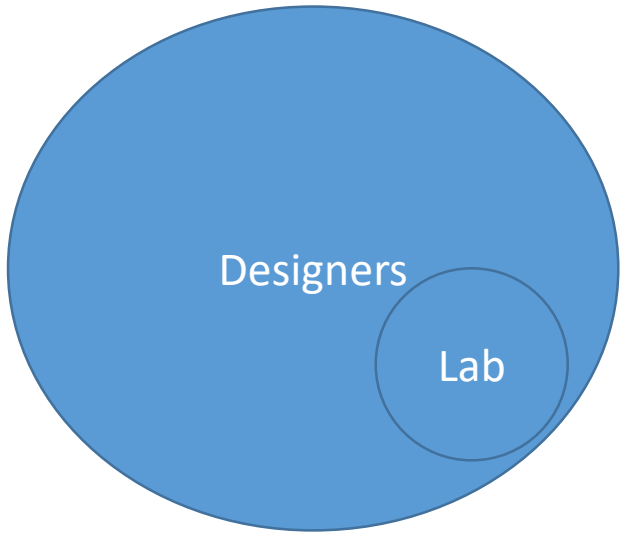


Low boundaries

- Weak protection
- Low transfer costs/high learning
- Low differentiation
- High risk
- E.g., Google’s 20% time

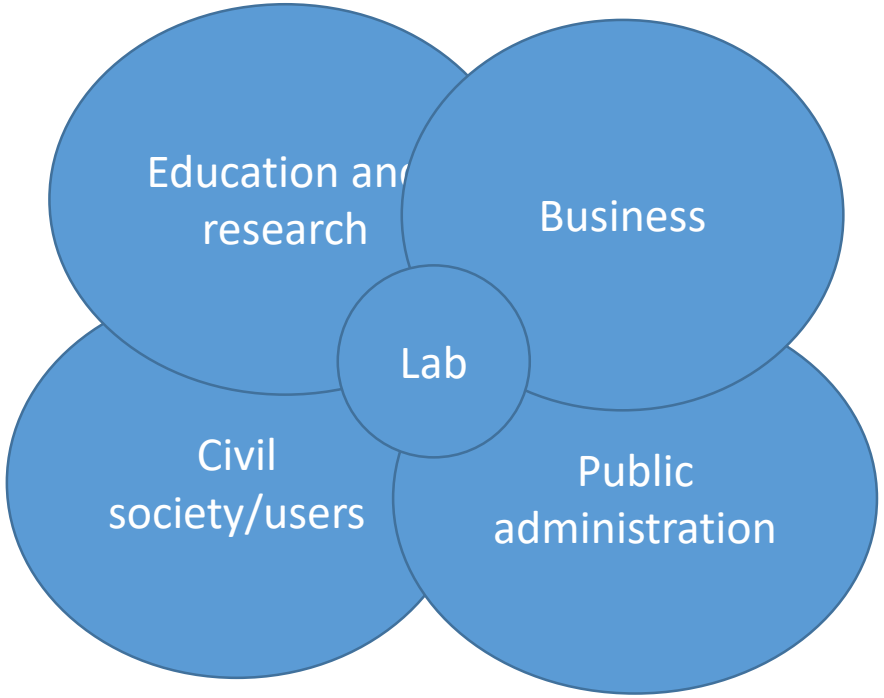
At what point in time – and how -should change come into the organization/city/locality/context?

(4) Collaboration



Aligned members

- Monistic
- Homogeneity
- E.g., innovation labs



Multiple stakeholders

- Dialectic, pluralistic
- Discourse, debate
- E.g., Change Labs, Urban Labs

How to achieve collective action and for what purpose?

(5) Organisation/process control

Free flow

- Emergent, changing processes
- Self-organization of autonomous agents
- The power is in relationships and alliances
- Adaptability
- Facilitator helps with sense making
- There might be no result -
  but if there is one it will be very meaningful.
- E.g., Tavistock labs

Tightly Scripted

- Rigid design of processes
- Prescribed collaboration
- The power is in the framing and the rules
- Clarity
- Facilitator helps execute the game plan
- There will definitely be a result - but is it meaningful?
- E.g., many design thinking methodologies

How does the process shape the outcome? Where is the power in the lab?

Internal lab dynamics

- Learning anxiety
- Psychological safety
- Identity challenges
- Defensive routines
- Empathy
- Problem solving
- Values and meaning
- etc

Lewin's field theory – challenges in application

a) The integrating of vast areas of very divergent facts and aspects: The development of a scientific language (concepts) which is able to treat cultural, historical, sociological, psychological, and physical facts on a common ground

b) The treating of these facts on the basis of their interdependence

c) The handling of both historical and systematical problems

d) The handling of problems related to groups as well as to individuals

e) The handling of all "sizes" of objects or patterns (social psychology has to include problems of a nation and its situation, as well as of a play group of three children and their momentary struggle)

f) Problems of "atmosphere" (such as friendliness, pressure, etc.)

g) Experimental social psychology will have to find a way to bring the large- size patterns into a framework small enough for the technical possibilities of experimentation

(6) Temporality

Stable

- Established as institution
- Allows for development over time

Transient

- Focus on specific outcomes
- Building on momentum

When should the lab be there – when not?
Once for two hours, once for one day, three days long weekend, two hours every two weeks for six iterations, two days every three months for one year, monthly for two years…?

Research agenda

- Understand theoretical underpinnings – formal and informal
- Understand internal organizational processes – what works and why? What doesn't and why?
- How do modes of experimentation enable or constrain innovation and change?
- How are 'solutions' translated and scaled?
- How do group dynamics shape labs? How are they managed, if at all?
- What impact does time/duration have on lab dynamics and effectiveness?
- How is impact understood and appreciated in multi-stakeholder lab contexts?
- How does power shape labs: before, during and after?