



LABS FOR  
SYSTEMS  
CHANGE

# Event Report

May 26, 2014

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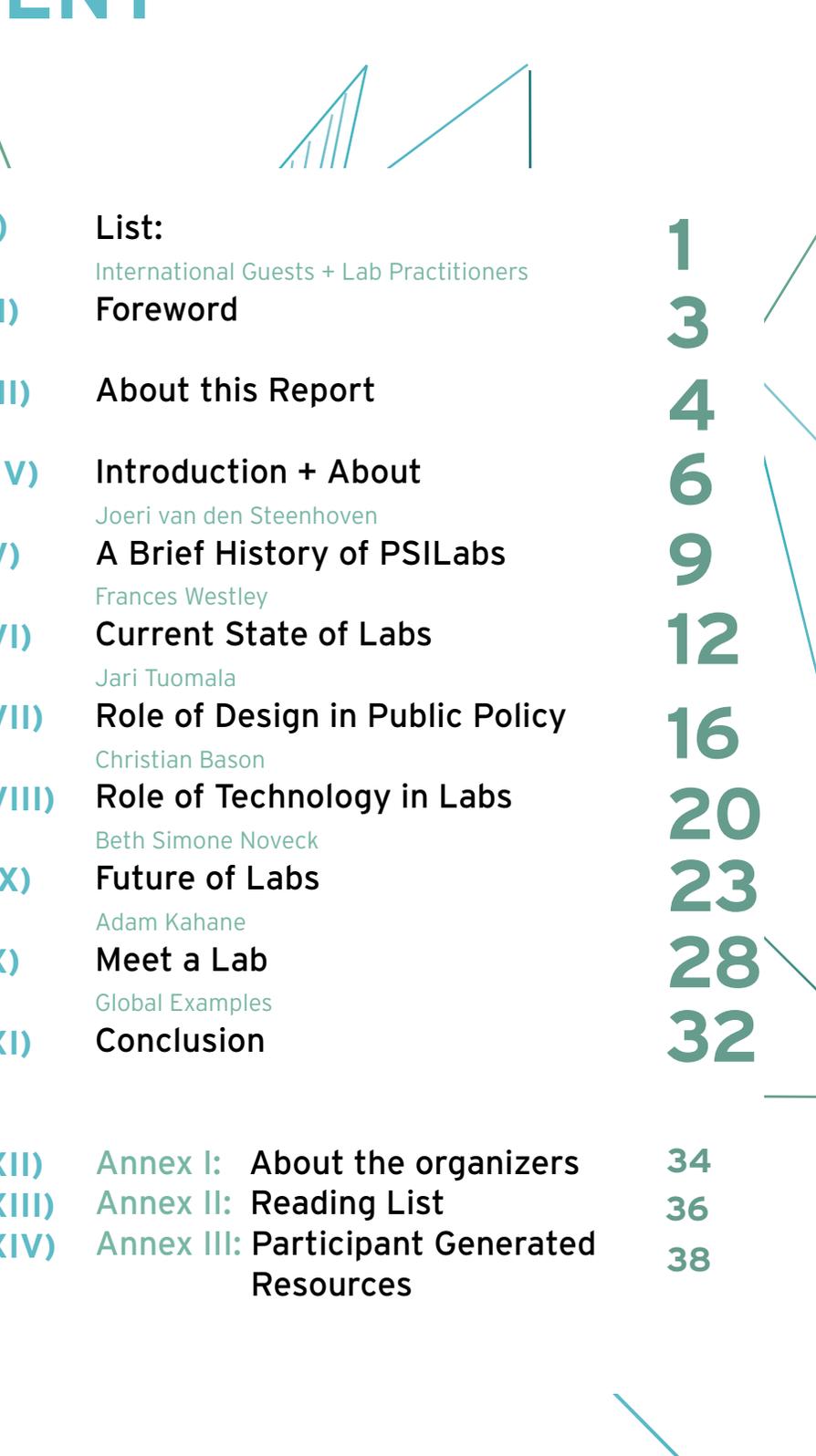
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## International Guests + Lab Practitioners



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# FOREWORD

Many of us feel that society is in a state of transformation as we see the effects of it around us: a financial crisis, climate change, trade and labour markets that are fundamentally changing and public systems that struggle to cope with the different world they need to operate in. Many of us feel we need change, and not just quick and simple change but change on a systems level.

Around the world, public and social innovation labs (or: PSI labs) are increasingly seen as vehicles to help solve complex social challenges that require systems change. These labs help to understand such challenges from new perspectives, often using human-centered design. Based on principles of experimentation and learning, they help convene stakeholders from across society to develop, test and scale new solutions. And they often help governments to develop new policies and redesign public services. In short, these labs support public and social innovation on the local, national and global level.

In many countries we now see these labs being established, from Europe to Australia, and from North to South America. But as PSI labs gain momentum around the world, we need to pay attention to what makes them valuable and what they need to be successful. These labs are still a fairly young construct. We need to develop further their strengths while overcoming their weaknesses. Because we deeply believe that public and social innovation labs are a useful and perhaps even a critical new approach to solving complex problems in a transforming world.

That is why we convened over 40 of the world's leading lab practitioners and thinkers. Between May 25 -27 they all came to MaRS Discovery District in Toronto (Canada) to share, develop and capture knowledge of global lab practices. And how they have inspired each other, but also the many Canadian guests in the room and the online viewers from around the world and us. Together they sought to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a good lab and its approaches.



**JOERI**

This report tries to reflect some of the discussions and learnings of the event. It is our humble attempt to capture the overwhelming richness and share it in a readable way. But please also visit our website to see the videos, get the slides or read more. We have created a separate section at <http://www.marsdd.com/systems-change/mars-solutions-lab/labs-systems-change/>.

We want to thank all participants, our sponsors and the many people who made Labs for Systems Change possible. And we thank our very talented Fariha Husain for her efforts in writing this report.



**SATSUKO**

**Joeri van den Steenhoven, MaRS Solutions Lab**  
**Satsuko van Antwerp, Social Innovation generation**

December 2014

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

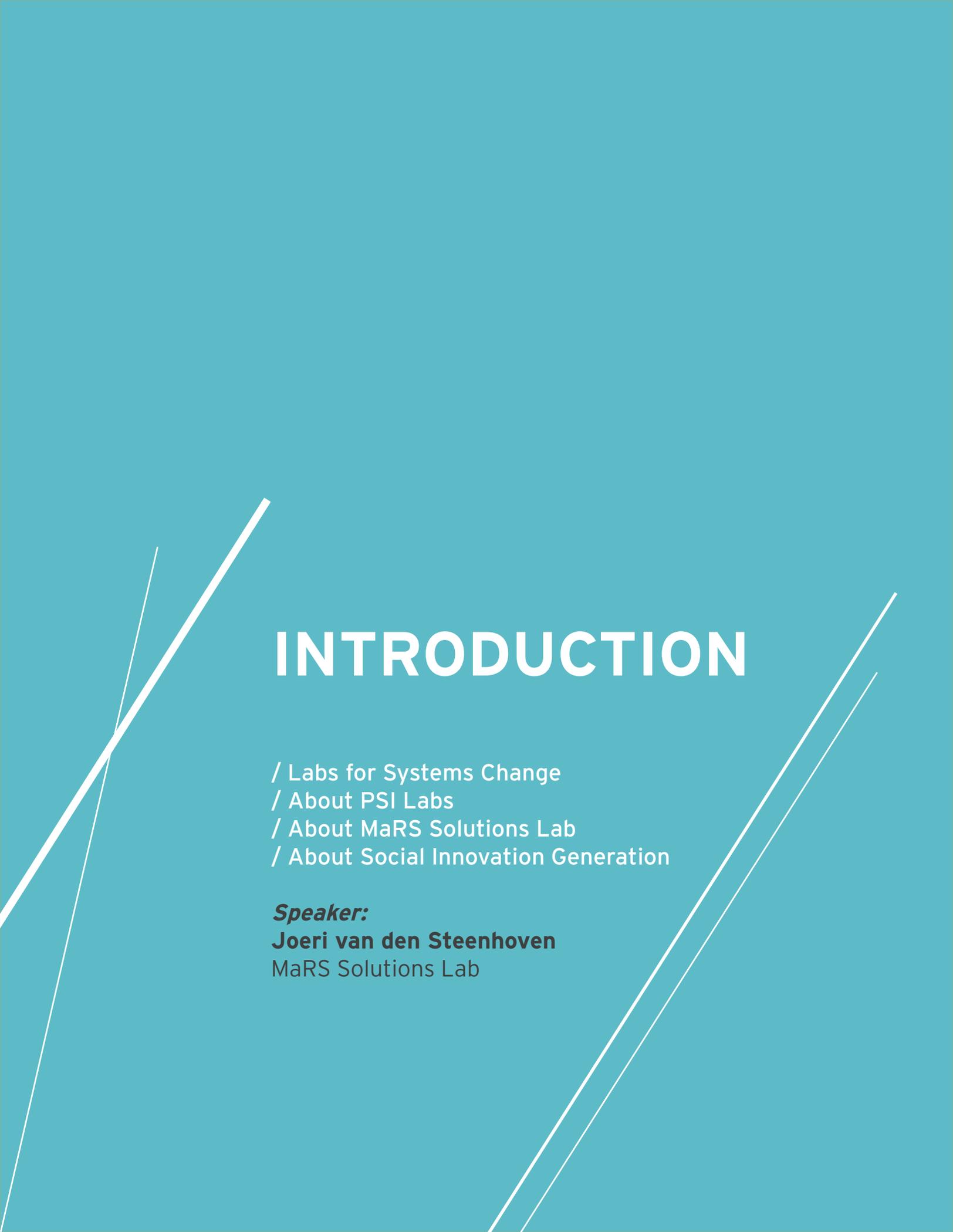
The purpose of this report is twofold. First, it provides a high-level summary of the main insights and ideas presented at [Labs for Systems Change](#) at MaRS. Second, it highlights key challenges that PSI labs will face as the field continues to grow.

This report begins with a brief look at the history and theoretical background of PSI labs, largely based on the opening presentation from the event by Frances Westley. It then dives into the current state of PSI labs, using insights from presenters such as Geoff Mulgan and others. In addition, the report offers an in-depth look at the role of design in public policy, based on the presentation by Christian Bason. The role of technology is also examined, with insights from Beth Simone Noveck on how PSI labs can be smarter together. It also contains examples from labs around the world, presented through “Meet a Lab” sessions held during the conference. Finally, the report discusses the future of PSI labs, based on contributions by Geoff Mulgan and Adam Kahane.

Throughout the report, you will also find a series of insightful tweets that both participants and speakers have tweeted under the hashtag [#psilabs](#). These tweets can be viewed on our [Epilogger](#) that has captured the online conversations of that day. The resulting 2,000+ captured tweets represents the level of excitement garnered around labs globally.

We hope this report helps readers to better understand what PSI labs are, the benefits they create, and the conditions under which they can provide value. Background material can be found in the Annex.

As the field of PSI labs continues to grow, we imagine the body of knowledge on them will only expand. This report serves as a way to capture the state of PSI labs in 2014.

The background is a solid teal color. There are several white diagonal lines of varying thicknesses and lengths. One thick line runs from the bottom left towards the top right. Another thick line runs from the top left towards the bottom right. There are also several thinner lines, some parallel to the thicker ones, creating a dynamic, geometric pattern.

# INTRODUCTION

/ Labs for Systems Change  
/ About PSI Labs  
/ About MaRS Solutions Lab  
/ About Social Innovation Generation

***Speaker:***

**Joeri van den Steenhoven**  
MaRS Solutions Lab

# INTRODUCTION



**Dominic Campbell**  
@dominiccampbell

This #PSILabs event is badass already. In a room with the most like of like minds. Gonna be a good couple of days.

**Keita Demming**  
@kdemming

How do we make the right thing to do the easy thing to do? What is the right thing to do? #psilabs #SocialLabs

**Lab for the city**  
@LabfortheCity

"We complicate to understand, we simplify to act." French saying quoted by @geoffmulgan Link simplicity to complexity. #psilabs

**Meghan Hellstern**  
@mhellstern

why #psilabs? social labs provide spaces to renegotiate aspects of social contracts that can otherwise appear intractable says @zaidhassan

## LABS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

A global movement of public and social innovation labs (PSI labs) has recently gained traction in the public and social services sectors. This movement was created to provide innovative thinking and practices to government and other social sector actors to aim for better social outcomes. Currently, the PSI labs field is growing rapidly, with labs popping up all over the world and collaborating with governments, non-governmental organizations and international organizations.

In light of this growing movement, MaRS Solutions Lab in partnership with Social Innovation Generation (SiG) hosted the first Global Labs Gathering at MaRS Discovery District in Toronto, Canada. It was the third and largest gathering to date (previous meetings were held by MindLab in Denmark, and by Kennisland in the Netherlands).

Labs for Systems Change brought together over 40 international guests and 100 participants from across Canada. Designers, policy-makers, academics, consultants and lab practitioners convened at MaRS to explore, expand and define the lab landscape. The event was also livestreamed by 140 online participants in North America, Europe and Asia.

The Labs for Systems Change conference was conceptualized as a forum for lab practitioners to discuss the future of PSI labs. The goal of the conference was to address key challenges for labs and how to grow this movement in the future. Each section of the day was devoted to exploring current lab practices in order to create recommendations for the future.

## ABOUT PSILabs

Watch Joeri van den Steenhoven's introduction to PSILabs [here](#):



PSI labs facilitate collaboration among stakeholders to solve a variety of complex social problems and move toward collective change. The PSI lab team should be dedicated to a goal of systems change using design-thinking approaches. They should also have a unique (or proven) process design for change and find or create a set of tools to implement the identified interventions. Lastly, they should have a physical space from which to work collaboratively on these complex problems.

Working in PSI labs also requires a value system that can be categorized into four pillars:

- 1** Implement a user and system perspective to understand how a user navigates a social problem so that the most poignant interventions can be designed.
- 2** Assume the role of a committed but neutral convener that is able to bring together all stakeholders within a system to co-create a collective solution.
- 3** Take successful interventions and work toward scale so that changes can be felt throughout the whole system.
- 4** Get used to taking risks and learning from successes and, more importantly, failures, so as to improve upon the lab methodology for future systems change endeavours.

These four pillars may vary in language between organizations but the bottom line is the commitment of PSI labs to co-creating better social outcomes.

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# HISTORY of PSI Labs

/ A Brief History of PSILabs  
/ Group Dynamics + Group Psychology  
/ Whole Systems Change Theory  
/ Design Thinking

***Speaker:***

**Frances Westley**

Waterloo Institute for  
Social Innovation & Resilience

# BRIEF HISTORY



## Brief history of PSI Labs

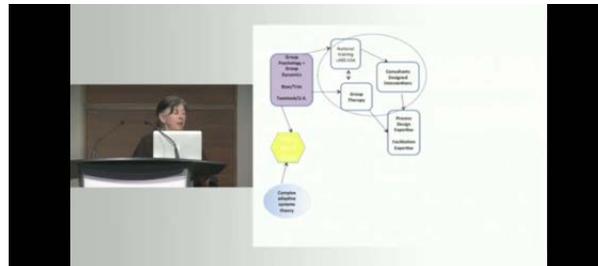
*"We act like systems in creating large-scale problems, but we act as individuals in trying to solve them." - Eric Trist*

The conference began with a primer on the history of PSI labs by Frances Westley, who presented highlights on the process of development and challenges facing PSI labs. Opening with the history of PSI labs provided attendees foundational knowledge on the PSI labs field from which to build on throughout the day.

Social innovation labs were based on a marriage between design thinking for social outcomes and complexity theory for whole systems change—with the goal of solving complex social problems. These labs are a hybrid between whole systems change labs and design labs which produced design for social innovation.

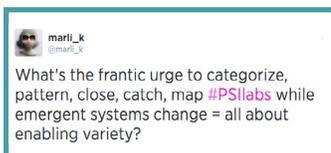
The field of [social innovation labs](#) is based on research in four broad academic streams: group dynamics, group psychology, complexity theory, and design thinking.

**Watch Frances Westley's talk on the history of PSILabs at the event [here](#):**



## Group Dynamics + Group Psychology

Between 1940 and 1970, at the London-based Tavistock Institute, social scientists developed a theory of group dynamics and change-based psychoanalytics. Both areas of study involved understanding how people respond to change, individually and in groups. Simultaneously, Kurt Lewin at the National Training Labs in the United States was a major contributor to the domain of group psychology. Lewin and his team laid the groundwork for the field of organizational design and development, a methodology that identifies effective reorganization of a group for the purpose of producing the highest efficiency output. These theories shaped the study of group dynamics, specifically surrounding inducing strategic change.



## Whole Systems Change Theory



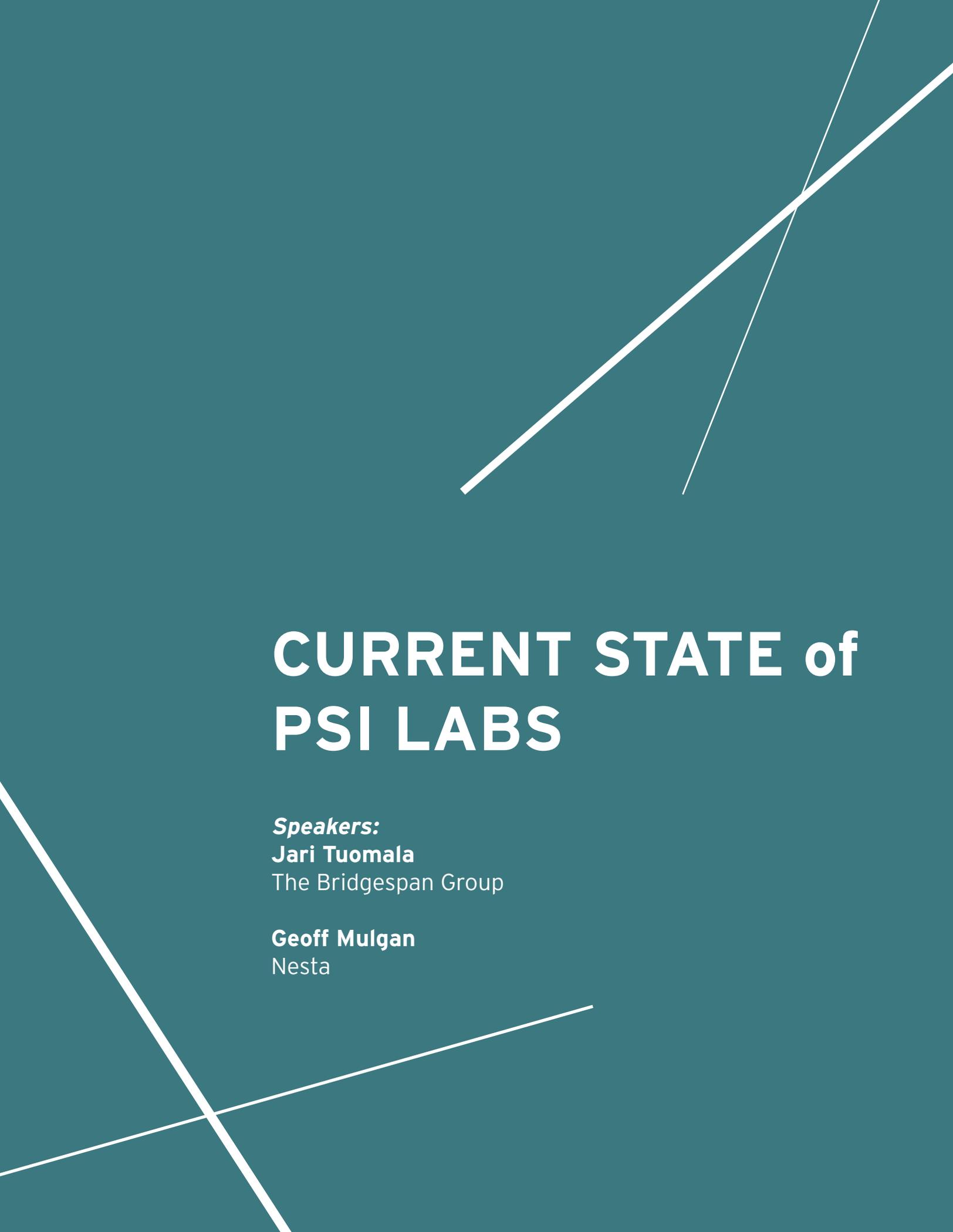
During the late 1950s to the early 1960s, Eric Trist from Tavistock combined open systems theory with the study of group dynamics and psychology into a new theory of whole systems change. Open systems theory describes a system that perpetually interacts with its environment. Trist iterated that systemic problems, also known as mega crises or mega messes, were ones where no single organization can change the course of the system. He famously believed that, “We worked as systems in creating problems but as individuals in solving them.” Thus, bringing the whole system together and applying an understanding of group dynamics are necessary factors to create systems change.

## Design Thinking

In the 21st century, whole systems change theory became connected to design thinking to create interventions for systems change. Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO, a global design consultancy firm, was largely influential in expanding the design thinking methodology of human-centred design for products. The extension into social innovation labs included the incorporation of design thinking into the actual process for group dynamics change in producing solutions. The use of technical capacities such as [computer modeling](#) was developed for prototyping solutions and was first used by Trist and others who were trailblazers in this regard.

At its most basic, design thinking is about designing interventions whereas whole systems change uses a collaborative process to solve complex problems. The marriage between these two fields produced social innovation/systems change labs that are robust in their process design and holistic in their approach to systemic problems. Examples of these labs include the [Media Lab at MIT](#), established 25 years ago, and the more recent [Change Lab at Stanford](#).

Moving forward, social innovation labs need to be guided by a [principle of transformation](#) in order to create solutions that change social relations at their core and lead to improved outcomes with lower costs. They need to produce a [cross-scale focus](#) by bringing together existing as well as future policy regimes and working with them to create their approach. Social innovation labs need to be [ahead of society](#) in determining possible future outcomes. Key challenges ahead will include prototyping interventions, especially when solutions have no technical components; however, using digital simulations or games may be one of the ways to address this.

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# CURRENT STATE of PSI LABS

*Speakers:*

**Jari Tuomala**

The Bridgespan Group

**Geoff Mulgan**

Nesta

# CURRENT STATE of PSI LABS



*"Our approach is to bring the policy-makers to the people rather than bring the people to the policy-maker." - Sarah Schulman, [InWithForward](#)*

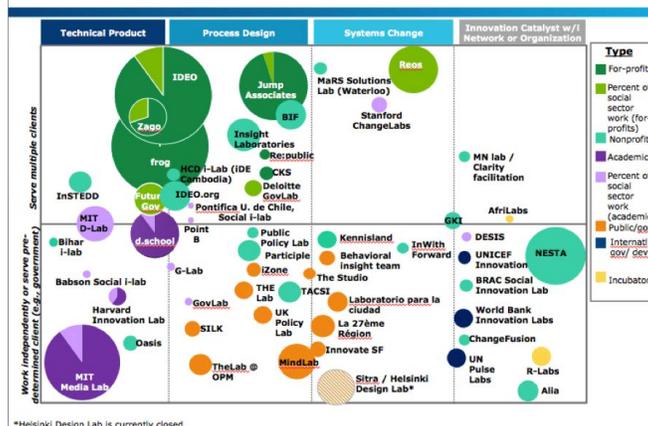


PSI labs as a new and rapidly growing field has created great excitement and interest within both the public and private sectors. [Jari Tuomala](#), a partner at [The Bridgespan Group](#), a US-based non-profit organization that provides management consulting to non-profits and philanthropists, presented research on the vastness of the social innovation lab industry. Later in the day, [Geoff Mulgan](#), the chief executive of [Nesta](#), commented on the lack of a "shared theory" among this expansive innovation labs field that would set PSI labs apart.

According to research, there are four characteristics that describe the innovation labs landscape:

- 1 **Diverse perspectives** that come from methods such as co-creation and citizen-centred design approaches that steer the dialogue away from *policy done to people* towards *policy created with and for people*.
- 2 **Experimental mindset** includes the process of prototyping and experimenting to test solutions. This is one of the key challenges labs face as experiments are not always endorsed or these potential solutions may stagnate at the pilot phase.
- 3 **Robust process design** is imperative to labs methodology as it sets labs apart from other types of policy and research institutions.
- 4 **Rigorous analysis** is required by labs to find specific points of intervention from which meaningful contributions can be formulated.

**What does the landscape of innovation labs look like today?**



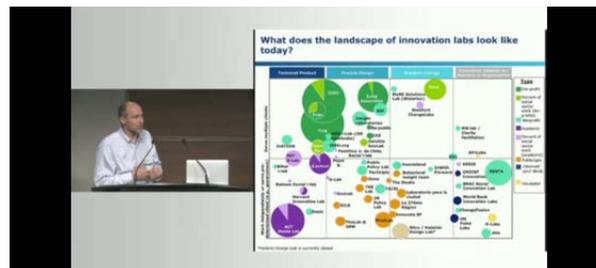
*Click to download Jari's slides*

As illustrated in the above chart of the innovation lab landscape, the field is

overlapping between the private and public sectors, with non-profits working in the same space as businesses. Currently, the public, non-profit, social innovation lab industry is estimated to be worth around \$150 million. While IDEO, one of the largest companies in the private for-profit space, generated \$130 million in revenue for 2013.

Albeit a comparatively small industry, PSI labs are gaining traction in both private and public spaces. However, the distinction between the two types of labs (public and social) is not stringent. **Social innovation labs** focus on social issues in which governments are key players whereas **public innovation labs** focus on government programming or policy for social and economic outcomes.

**Watch Jari Tuomala's talk on the current state of PSILabs at the event [here](#):**



Geoff Mulgan offered a shared theory for PSI labs that differentiates them from others in the public and social sectors. This shared theory includes having an **“iterative view of policy”** that focuses on both a bottom-up and top-down process instead of solely one or the other. Likewise, he argues that labs need to gather experiences and garner insights by **collaborating with the people for whom policy is being designed** and thus work towards a human-centred process. Therefore, rather than waiting for policy changes, labs should **“learn by doing”** and experiment rapidly so as to learn from failures and apply successes. Finally, labs should **isolate the root causes** of systemic problems and create systems change by mobilizing stakeholders in the field.

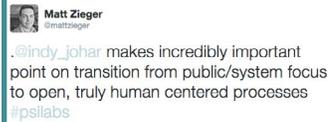
Lab practitioners are well aware of this shared theory; however, government and future policy-makers are not always well versed in this method. The PSI labs process of policy design is fundamentally different from the way policy is taught in post-secondary institutions. This significant difference not only positions PSI labs as stand-out organizations but also shines light on a critical flaw in the policy process: if PSI labs are working toward systems change, then traditional policy-makers are upholding the status quo.

In pursuing this shared theory, labs will face challenges in determining how to act upon these recommendations. There are examples of many labs globally that are working on systems change at the city, provincial or state, national and international level. **Four concrete examples of labs and their outcomes are included in this report on page 28 with links to more information.**

In light of the current state of labs, Jari Tuomala ended off by posing a few key questions to the conference audience. He asked whether the field needed to become larger to accommodate for new labs or if these new labs will change the trajectory of the labs landscape. How will the expansion of the field of systems change labs and more broadly PSI labs be affected by growth in response to demand? Might there be consolidation of labs as more enter the field? If there is an amalgamation of the lab landscape, what form will it take and will this strengthen PSI labs in the future?



Watch Geoff Mulgan's reflection of PSILabs at the event [here](#):



A panel discussion on the current state of PSI labs followed the presentations. Panellists included Sarah Schulman from [InWithForward](#), Indy Johar from the [Young Foundation](#), and Stephane Vincent from [La 27e Region](#), and was moderated by Joeri van den Steenhoven from the [MaRS Solutions Lab](#). This was a captivating first panel that focused on key lab challenges. These challenges included a need for an expressed value set that puts forth a specific goal that the lab works toward achieving within the system. Although PSI labs work with institutionally bound systems, the labs themselves do not need to be and can work as civic movements operating from the ground up. This tension of working within or outside of the "system" arose throughout the day and is further discussed in the section of this report on the future of labs.

Watch the panel discussion [here](#):



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# Role of Design in Public Policy

*Speaker:*  
**Christian Bason**  
MindLab

# Design in Public Policy



*"Governments are, ultimately, the owners of public problems, and policies are the approaches they use to address them." - Christian Bason, [MindLab](#)*

Public problems are becoming increasingly complex beyond the ability of governments to solve on their own. Designing public policy that meets these needs necessitates a principled change in approach that is outlined in Christian Bason's presentation and book, [Leading Public Sector Innovation: Co-creating for a Better Society](#). These changes include:



## **From resisting to embracing complexity**

Encouraging governments to be open to and accepting of change by making problems "experientially available." While working with the Ministry of Employment on government reform for major entitlements and public services in Denmark, MindLab created a rehabilitation team with ministry employees. This team conducted interviews with citizens who would access services, frontline workers that would deliver services, and administrators from all levels of government. Information gathered from the interviewees was given back to mid-level managers, policy-makers and others in government in order to provide transparency for a more flexible and open policy process. Government was encouraged to view policy as something dynamic and emerging by hearing the stories from those affected by the policy.

## **From problem solving to envisioning new futures**

Collectively creating a new or different system. MindLab developed a design game based on ethnographic research from Danish schools in order to determine the best web platform for Danish public education. The goal of this web platform was to help teachers leverage the best in educational resources and technology to work with all types of students. The design game involved teachers and students in designing the website by informing policy-makers of their needs.

## **From system focus to citizen centrality**

Co-creating to develop policy that can help citizens learn to help themselves. In Denmark, a program to help senior citizens become self-reliant was developed through interviews with seniors conducted by personnel from five different ministries. In these interviews, each citizen was asked about their everyday needs and challenges including health concerns, physical mobility and social issues. After the interviews, a program was developed to help senior citizens address these issues themselves instead of solely offering monetary compensation.

### From unilateral action to shaping new alliances

Including all levels of governments and citizens, from all walks of life, in the policy process. MindLab is working with the Danish Labour Authority on developing a new platform to connect job seekers with employers or mentors. Initially, the idea was to offer a digital platform for networking. However, the idea was considered too redundant since job seekers had other online profiles with platforms such as LinkedIn and with professional association websites. The goal now is to use existing resources to create different mentor models to address a variety of needs.

### From facilitation to stewardship

Equipping stakeholders with new tools to produce policy outcomes that navigate cultural, political and economic interests. MindLab attempts to align government agencies around a common purpose as organizations often interact with numerous public services. In the case of opening a new business in Denmark, such as a restaurant, business owners need to gather information on taxes, food safety and occupational health. Government ministries need to find a functional way to coordinate services to provide this information with ease.

### From policy-as-strategy to policy-as-impact

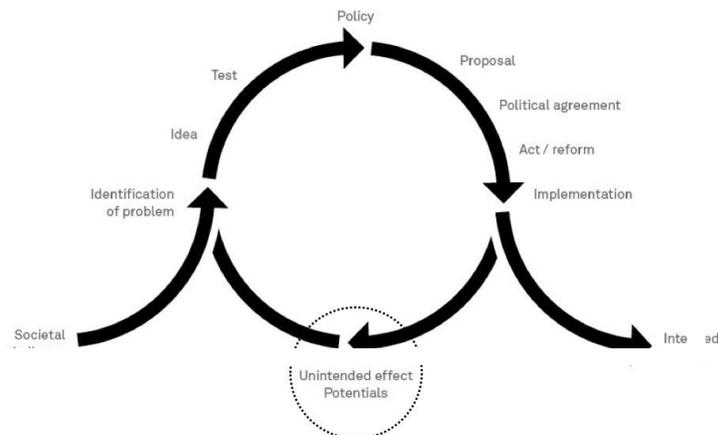
Shifting to this mindset might mean changing the entire policy and putting the human experience first. In one case, MindLab worked with a personal service worker who suffered an injury that left her paralyzed. The policy response was to ensure that her insurance funding was available to her. What if the goal of the policy was to help her regain her independence instead? This would drastically change the policy's formulation to one where the agencies become involved in a citizen's life with the goal of improving it.

All of these changes can have unintended consequences, good or bad, which may profoundly shape the system. Labs are thus an expansion of a government's toolkit and can help replace outdated tools or create new ones. (See below, MindLab's policy innovation model.)



**MIND LAB**

The shape of a new and more humble policy model?



Watch Christian Bason's talk on Design in Public Policy at the event [here](#):



The panel that directly followed included Chelsea Mauldin of [Public Policy Lab](#), Andrea Siodmok of [UK Policy Lab](#), Chris Vanstone of [TACSI](#), and was moderated by Eduardo Staszowski from [DESIS Lab](#).

Watch the panel discussion [here](#):



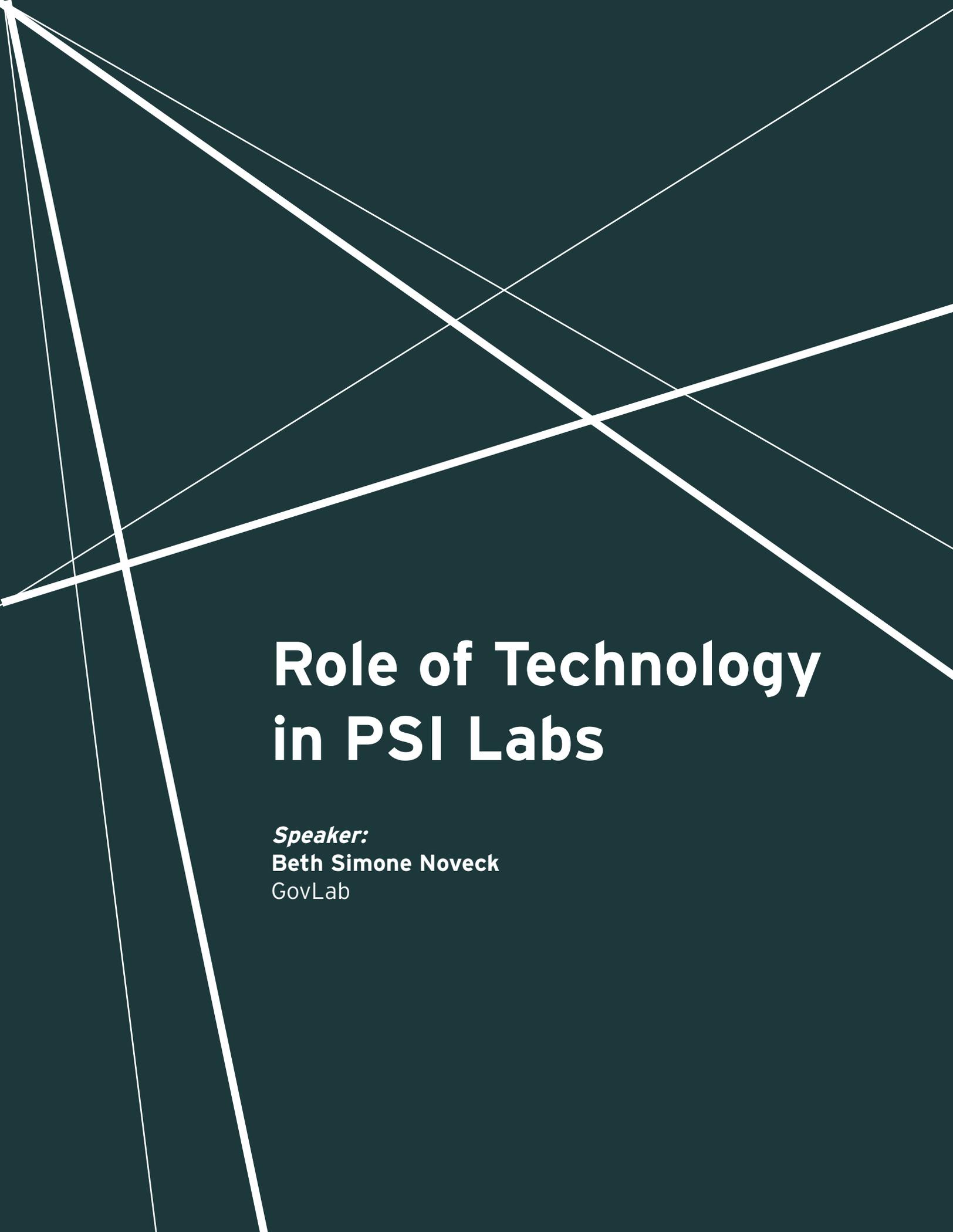
The panel concluded that there are ultimately two broad goals for design in the innovation lab process:

- 1 Design produces an appreciation of quality in terms of process as well as outcomes.
- 2 Design puts the emphasis on the end-user by focusing on human-centered interventions and this brings a fresh perspective on policy.

Effective policy can be achieved by using these two goals in conjunction with the purpose of better social outcomes. In embedding these methods as policy design norms, PSI labs are required to lead the way and show government how to implement these ideas. Therefore, the field needs to consider further establishing itself as a central player in the policy process, now and in the future.



According to Christian Bason, labs need to work on five major areas: **authorization, skills, metrics, research and politics**. Labs need to make the **role of design in policy a legitimate practice** for governments and policy-makers to use. Labs need to **build skills within government** and policy-makers internally while **simultaneously training designers** that can implement labs methodologies. Labs should encourage government to **acknowledge value beyond the strict monetary standards** that currently exist to help develop better metrics of social impact. Conducting further research on **more effective and efficient methods** of designing for policy could also lead to better outcomes. Lastly, labs should create a **space for political decision-making** that includes all stakeholders, from citizen to policy-maker.



# Role of Technology in PSI Labs

*Speaker:*  
**Beth Simone Noveck**  
GovLab

# Role of Technology in PSI Labs



*"...Instead of thinking about 22 million mouths to feed, think of 22 million minds and what a collective mindhive like that could accomplish..."*

- Gabriel Gomez-Mont, [Lab for the City](#)

**Meghan Hellstern**  
@mhelstern

"focusing our collective intelligence on the end-user's experience" - lovely turn of phrase from @AndreaSiadmok #psilabs

The use of technology can act as a facilitator for open and collaborative approaches to decision-making and problem solving as well as to provide a platform for sharing ideas. [Beth Simone Noveck](#) from GovLab set out a new vision for governance in a technology-enabled collaborative world where governments and citizens "solve society's biggest problems and create a new form of democracy."

GovLab's central hypothesis is that, "when governments and institutions use new tools and practices to open themselves and partner with citizens to make decisions, they are more legitimate and effective." These new tools can include technology and, more importantly, the use of the Internet to improve lab methodology.

**Christian Bason**  
@christianbason

@bethnoveck is offering @TheGovLab as a powerhouse of digitally enabled methods platforms networks for #psilabs community to engage with.

The introduction of [more networked ways of learning and sharing](#) was demonstrated during the event through the use of collaborative tools such as [hackpad](#), an online note-sharing platform and the GovLab Wiki ([Open Governance Knowledge Base](#)). Partnerships in this space are being created such as the Open Data Research Network that consists of a variety of international organizations that share their insights. (See figure below for a list of institutions). Both of these new technologies can further augment sharing between labs and increase the availability of comparative research for collaborative development. Platforms such as these can increase the accessibility of information, foster the dissemination of knowledge, and can act as a catalogue of case studies for PSI labs to share.

**Meghan Hellstern**  
@mhelstern

.@marli\_k @TheGovLab good point - very real risk of creating a 'cult of the best practice' that can stifle innovation & creativity #psilabs



**Kaitlin Almack**  
@kitalmack

Collaboration isn't about sharing, its about being committed to solve a particular dilemma and co-defining the process to do so. #psilabs

Focusing on evidence-based interventions requires using all available data, [open, big and small](#), from many sources to provide another repository of information from which PSI labs can draw. Further, labs can benefit from the advent of social physics, the study of using big data for social outcomes through creating a predictive and computational theory of human behavior.

Watch Beth Simone Noveck's talk on Technology and PSI Labs at the event [here](#):



In the panel discussion on the same topic with Gabriella Gomez-Mont from [Lab for the City](#), Dominic Campbell from [FutureGov](#), Filippo Addarii from Europe Lab, and moderated by Brenton Caffin of [Nesta](#), the panellists discussed the merits of using technology in labs practices. They also emphasized fostering grounded and substantial collective intelligence from the use of networked databases that could become searchable communities that could help with scaling and testing of prototypes. However, in the previous panel on the state of PSI labs, it was also mentioned that limitations do exist in the information gathered from sources like big data. Since data may not capture those not on the Internet, this means that labs cannot solely rely on this form of information. Labs will need to simultaneously pursue [more localized data gathering methods](#) such as ethnographic studies.

Watch the panel discussion [here](#):





# Future of Labs

**/ Key Issues**  
**/ Power + Politics**

***Speaker:***  
**Adam Kahane**  
Reos Partners

# Future of Labs



*"We complicate to understand and we simplify to act. We develop methods, we develop ideas but it's important we then challenge and interrogate them. It's out of these contrarian instincts that we get better ideas."*

- Geoff Mulgan, [Nesta](#)



In order for PSI labs to become a true catalyst for long-term change, lab practitioners need to directly address the wide array of challenges and questions that were posed at Labs for Systems Change. Over the duration of the conference, many speakers, panellists and attendees imparted thoughts on the future of the PSI labs field. In this final chapter, we try to highlight the thoughts that resonated with the audience.

## Key issues that PSI labs need to address are:

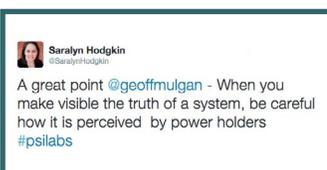
- legitimacy of the field;
- defined metrics and scaling;
- improving the skills and methods used by labs; and
- navigating the political environment that surrounds the policy-making process.



Furthermore, there was an implicit idea around building a global lab community that would share experiences and best practices in order to strengthen the field into the future.

## Legitimacy

PSI labs need to garner legitimacy to create widespread endorsement for public policy design from governments, citizens and other stakeholders. PSI labs are currently often at the fringes of the public policy debate. Establishing successful PSI labs requires dealing with several tensions addressed at the Labs for Systems Change conference. The way PSI labs deal with these tensions will determine their perceived legitimacy. These tensions include the conceivable need for an expressed value proposition while acknowledging that evidence and innovation can have a difficult relationship. It also means outlining the pillars and principles of lab practices that we regard as essential for PSI labs to function properly, while remaining open and flexible in their application. The tension exists in serving (and solving) the problem versus serving the institution (or the funder/client).



In these activities, do labs need to become more than neutral facilitators between key stakeholders in order to achieve their goals? Will labs have to define values as being more than simply monetary as they work with people who function in nuanced systems that demand tangible results? Between enhancing the quality of life of the citizen and creating fiscal savings for governments that are trying to balance budgets, where does the accountability for lab results lie? These are all important questions that need to be answered more clearly.



## Metrics

 Christian Bason  
@christianbason

@gquaggiotto @dominiccampbell Ultimately it is about #psilabs massively lowering transaction cost of another way of "doing government".

Establishing defined metrics is a key challenge for PSI labs and an important part of determining the efficacy of labs. Metrics that quantify more than traditional financial measures and additionally gauge changes in quality of life or satisfaction may need to be taken into account. As the needs of government and citizens can be quite different, what are the right metrics that take into account results for both? Determining these differences and similarities can lead to the creation of more robust metrics that could be used as evidence to persuade those skeptical of lab methodology.

## Scaling

 Cameron Norman  
@ccnorman

The time, energy and resources need to be commensurate to the challenges we seek to address. A workshop won't cut it - Adam Kahane #PSILabs

Measuring impact is necessary for developing scaling mechanisms. Finding appropriate scaling models for the wide variety of lab interventions that are sustainable into the long term is another important yet difficult subject for labs to tackle. Resources are scarce and labs need to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions they have developed. Ideal future scenarios would include service providers co-developing interventions to the degree that they can whole-heartedly take ownership of delivering them, and in doing so, increase opportunities for scaling initial lab efforts.

 Dominic Campbell  
@dominiccampbell

I still want to hear one story of cost vs impact of Labs. Not heard one yet frustratingly #PSILabs

Considering that systems change is about more than just conducting a small experiment, scaling is fundamental to the overall goal of widespread change for better outcomes. PSI labs are about developing strategies to test what will work to change the system and scaling these methods in order to create a significant transformation.

## Funding

 Chris Sigaloff  
@sigaloff

Important question for labs for social change is how to fund disruption. Not many systems want to pay for their own destruction. #nsilabs

The way PSI labs are funded determines largely what they can do. The benefit of long-term funding and being part of an institution (for example, inside government) is the ability to follow through the entire process towards systems change from a long-term change perspective. But short-term funding from different sources stimulates creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship that is needed to develop new solutions. Types of funding may also differ depending on the stages of work. For instance, prototyping and scaling may require different funding schemes. PSI labs need to have a clear funding strategy. We need to realize that creating real systems change does not come cheap, and that taking no action toward change is often more expensive. Convincing stakeholders of this premise is precisely the challenge many labs face.

## Skills

 James Arron  
@jamesarron

Lets remember most schools still teach "policy" as something governments do to people, says @geoffmulgan #breakingsiloes #DCLake

Improving skills of lab practitioners and policy-makers by building capacity will in turn improve lab practices. The field must continue to find new ways to support other labs and encourage a more diverse but strong system of changemakers. This will require extensive research to quickly learn new and effective methods, skills and interventions for public policy design. Ultimately, labs should enable government to be a "force for good" by equipping them with the appropriate vocabulary and tools required to address systems change issues.

 Christian Bason  
@christianbason

Geoff Mulgan: Policy makers do not access the most basic knowledge of innovations in their field, such as in jobs policy. #psilabs

An inevitable tension exists between figuring out the right skills as well as organization of a lab and the impact these labs are having on the communities they serve. This tension results in a dilemma where labs can become so consumed with getting the process right that their results are hindered. While this could be damaging to the field, it is important to remember that operational design of the lab

process and the strategic design for achieving results are actually fundamentally connected. Both operational and strategic design must be robust for labs to succeed. As such, labs may require a reminder from time to time of the reason for their existence, which is ultimately results driven, as their purpose is to solve complex social challenges.

## Power + Politics

How do labs position themselves among political establishments while maintaining objectivity and independence? Where does the space to engage in the politically embedded aspects of PSI lab work exist and how can this space be curated productively? An ongoing conversation needs to be facilitated to define this space or create parameters for these interactions.



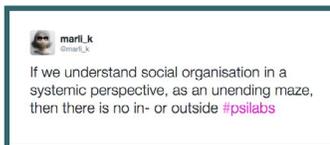
**Susan Ursel** (@sursel002)  
What are the politics of social innovation anyway? Efficiency, legitimacy, effectiveness, engagement? Or something else? #psilabs

## Proximity to Government: The Radical's Dilemma

Being situated within or outside the establishment offers a different set of rewards and challenges that will need to be weighed by lab practitioners. Working on the outside of government, labs can access big data, ethnographic research, peer networks and the collective power of citizens. However, these outside labs may lack rigorous funding structures and suffer from a precariousness of resources. Labs that are situated within government can have access to these same resources but they may also have greater bureaucratic constraints, predetermined goals and strict mandates such as KPI targets. Although trade-offs exist on both spectrums, is there a hybrid model where labs can effectively position themselves? Creating a dichotomy between private and public labs may not be the most productive way to start this conversation. It may not even be the right conversation at all.



**Dominic Campbell** (@dominiccampbell)  
A fan of Stéphane Vincent of @La27eregion's take on #psilabs. Ignore power and politics and you can forget disruptive change.



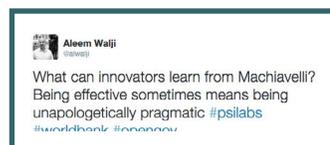
**marl\_k** (@marl\_k)  
If we understand social organisation in a systemic perspective, as an unending maze, then there is no in- or outside #psilabs

## Guile: A Quality of PSI Labs?

Despite where labs are positioned, the goals of systems change through public and social innovation are always the priority. Making these key decisions are left to the leadership of lab practitioners who have opened, or are opening, a lab. When making decisions for labs, what are the essential qualities of PSI labs to successfully lead government into envisioning new futures? Geoff Mulgan asserted that many individuals working in the PSI lab space, including himself, were **contrarians**; they have a tendency to naturally disagree with things. Lab practitioners should use this key skill to develop new ideas and methods to challenge the status quo as well as each other to develop the best outcomes for society. Geoff went on to suggest that labs should explicitly incorporate Machiavelli's teachings on guile into their strategy for building partnerships and maintaining relationships. Labs value strategy but do not necessarily engage in dialogue on their approaches with those in power, which are, in many respects, reflective of the use of guile in developing tactics, building alliances and getting around corners. Labs must realize that they can simultaneously be cunning in advancing systems change without diluting the focus of their project. This distills the essence of PSI labs, as passion and efficacy must exist together for systemic change.



**Jennifer Miller** (@jennymiller)  
I'd suggest it's possible to be an innovator and not contrarian, but all you contrarians would disagree with me. #psilabs cc @geoffmulgan



**Aleem Wajid** (@aleemwajid)  
What can innovators learn from Machiavelli? Being effective sometimes means being unapologetically pragmatic #psilabs #thinkthink #innovation

## Relationship with Government

This discussion hints at the hidden tensions between PSI labs and their partners in government, as labs tread a delicate line by being public and social innovators. Labs are essentially catalysts of disruption with the purpose of bringing better outcomes. Finding people in positions of authority who welcome change that could fundamentally effect their operations may be few and far between. Building an understanding of PSI labs and capacity in terms of systems change and design



**Nisa Malli** (@nismalli)  
"These kind of innovative approaches are inherently disruptive to bureaucratic hierarchical government" - Eduardo Staszowski at #psilabs



Chris Sigaloff  
@csigaloff

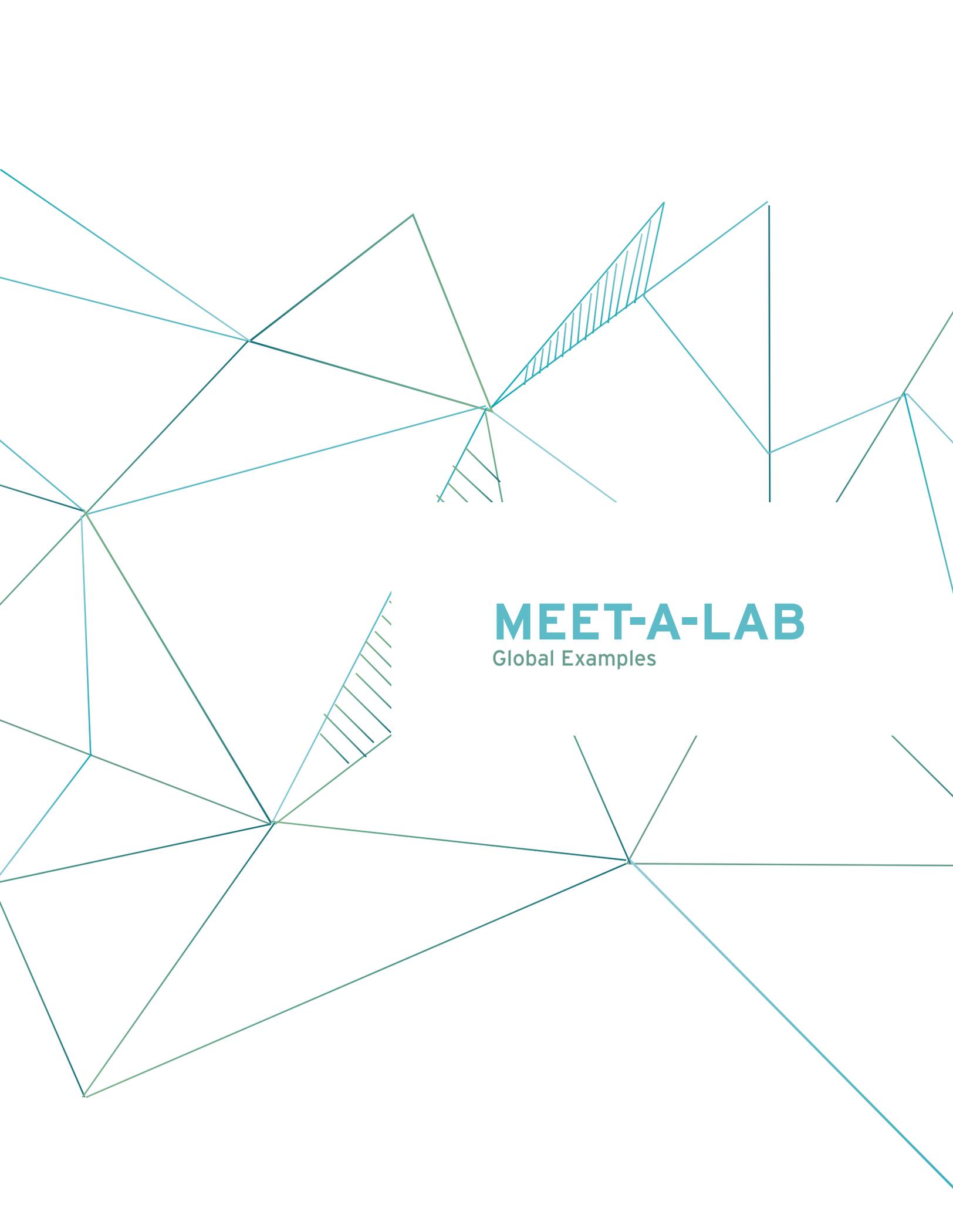
agree with @ChelseaMauldin that the whole point of inside/outside position of labs takes us to how we organize, finance & run labs  
#psilabs



Meghan Hellstern  
@mhellstern

we've spent too long using sticks & stones to bring gov into fold; need to rethink incentivizing innovation - Gabriella Gomez-Mont #psilabs

thinking within government could dramatically affect current relations for the better. This type of capacity building across all sectors is known as recombinant innovation where simultaneously many different sectors must change for the goal of systems change to be achieved. PSI labs and governments must build long-term partnerships to reach the goal of better outcomes for the citizen. Since the citizen is the ultimate user, labs have a duty to work with government and not for them.



# MEET-A-LAB

Global Examples

# MEET-A-LAB

At Labs for Systems Change, “Meet a Lab” roundtable discussions were held to curate discussion on lab practices among PSI lab practitioners. There were three rounds of these sessions on three different topics: lab approaches, organization of the lab, and lab futures. Overall these discussions fostered thought-provoking insights that were captured on our [Labs for Systems Change hackpad](#) where participants uploaded notes on each session.

**In this next section, we profile some of the PSI labs that were at the event to demonstrate lab interventions and clearly show the outcomes of each.**

## **Kafka Brigade (Kennisland 2006-2010, now independent, Netherlands)**

*“First aid for bureaucratic breakdown.”*

[Kafka Brigade](#) is a program initially established in 2006 by [Kennisland](#), a public innovation lab in the Netherlands. The Kafka Brigade is operated and implemented by a group of global professionals that specialize in government red tape reduction. They also work towards eradicating and minimizing bureaucratic dysfunction resulting in better service delivery and more efficient access to services. The program became independent of Kennisland in 2010 and has operations in two countries, Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The main principles include a focus on the end-user of a service to determine where the bureaucratic issues are and then taking this perspective to analyze the issue with all parties involved including the user and the government. At this point the policies and rules are reviewed with all stakeholders to determine improvements, which may be unconventional. Results of these discussions are compiled into a report that is given to managers who hold the responsibility to implement these co-created solutions. The Kafka Brigade operates “under the radar” in order to ensure that their clients work in an open and honest environment, without any outside pressure.

**Outcomes:** The Kafka Brigade has been able to become a sustainable service, independent of Kennisland. It has scaled starting in the Netherlands and then in the U.K. With over 45 cases the Kafka Brigade has helped to remove red tape and reduce burdens leading to cost savings, reduction of time spent on paperwork and shortening of lead times for processes like approving permit requests. The Kafka Brigade is also working globally as it has worked on projects with governments around the world.

## Family by Family (TACSI, Australia)

*"We want to see all families thrive, not just survive."*

Family by Family is a program that was co-created with the citizens of South Australia and The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI). [TACSI](#) was established in Adelaide through seed funding from the South Australian government in 2009. Family by Family was first created in Marion, South Australia in 2011 to find a solution to issues concerning family breakdown in response to crisis or stress that resulted from children being separated from their families. Australia has experienced a 51% increase in the number of children being removed from their homes since 2005, and this has ultimately led to a large economic impact as the long-term cost of child abuse and neglect is estimated at \$1,944 million (AUD) per year.

[Family by Family](#) is described as, "a network of families helping families." Families known as "sharing families" who have gone through stressful times and are ready to share their experiences are brought together with "seeking families" which are currently experiencing problems and are seeking out guidance. Sharing families are given training and tools on how to work together with seeking families towards their goals. Seeking families first set goals for what they would like to change with the help of their sharing families and program coaches are on the outside of this relationship, acting as a resource to help both families through the process

**Outcomes:** In its first year of operation, 90% of participating families answered on a survey of the program that they met their goals. In terms of cost, this program was \$13,000 (AUD) for a pair of families, which is well below the yearly cost of \$56,000 (AUD) for children in state care. Family by Family has also scaled to other parts of Australia; in 2012, it opened in Playford, South Australia, and in early 2014, it opened in Mount Druitt, New South Wales.



## Studio Schools (Young Foundation, U.K.)

*"In Studio Schools, how students learn is as important as what they learn."*

[Studio schools](#) are focused on interactive learning structured around educating for practical skills training to prepare young adults for 21st century life and work. In 2010 the first studio schools were launched in England, a concept that the [Young Foundation](#) created and developed, and co-founded the Studio Schools Trust. Studio schools were based on the needs of students in the U.K., where less than 50% of students were meeting the standard achievement targets set by the government. Simultaneously, the unemployment rate for students has stagnated at 10% for the past two decades and two-thirds of employers surveyed said that employability for young people needed to be prioritized.

Studio schools in the U.K. were implemented for students aged 14 to 19. The emphasis of a studio school is on practical work training, even structuring the curriculum based on a 9-to-5 workday, shaping the learning environment like a workplace instead of a traditional classroom. Studio schools cover all subjects including English, math and science, and even have paid work placements that offer students the potential for future employment. These schools were also created as a solution to youth disengagement in the British school system. Through hands-on learning methods students are able to redefine their own work environments.

**Outcomes:** Almost 50 studio schools in England are currently in operation or will be in operation by 2015. Each school has 300 students and is focused on tailoring resources to the needs of their students. Studio schools have flourished into a global movement with many currently open or in the process of opening worldwide.

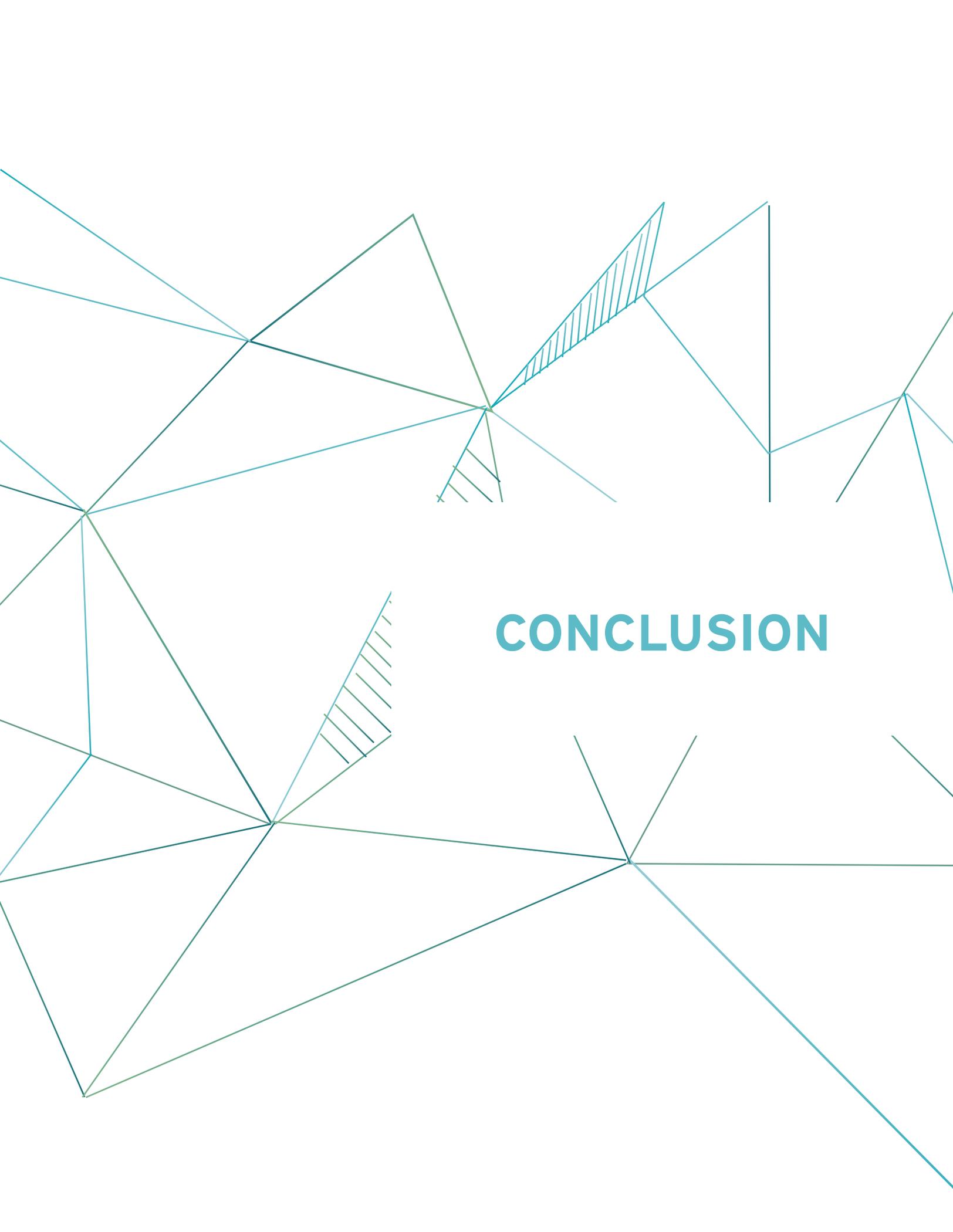
## Branchekode.dk (MindLab, Denmark)

*"A well-functioning industry code website presupposes that the authorities collaborate on the development of the solution..."*

[Branchekode.dk](#) is an industry coding website that businesses of all sizes are required to use in order to register their companies in Denmark. These codes are very important for the tax purposes of businesses and for data collection. Ultimately, this system of classification had led to much confusion among Danish business owners in the past, as they would contact many different public offices for information. This cost the government a large amount of public sector resources and time. Repeated misclassification resulted in many statistical errors as well as unnecessary inspections.

[MindLab](#) worked with the Danish Business Authority's development group, Team Effective Regulation (TER), and consulted with users of this service as well as public servants responsible for the classification system. In these interviews, MindLab and TER were able to determine the shortcomings of the current system and where they were most concentrated. In response, TER developed a prototype for a clear online system based on a detailed manual produced by MindLab.

**Outcomes:** Branchekode.dk is estimated to result in a savings of \$24 million (DKK) to the Danish government from 2011 to 2015 with a return on investment of 21 times its initial cost.



# CONCLUSION

# CONCLUSION

The Labs for Systems Change conference held at MaRS was designed to convene professionals in the PSI labs space to determine the road map ahead for the field. This resulted in an ongoing discussion during the three days of the event that focused heavily on the future—on how we grow and meet the key challenges of the field. The next step for lab practitioners is to create ways to collaboratively face these key issues and continue to create systems change that moves society towards better outcomes.

As the conference came to a close, there were many lasting impressions, ideas and insights. PSI labs are great conveners of stakeholders; however, this is not where the lab process stops. Simply gathering people into a room will not bring systems change; we must work with these key individuals on strategies to experiment and determine intervention points. Experimenting itself is not enough. The goal is to scale successful experiments to produce better outcomes throughout a system.

A key caveat is that experimentation needs to be supported by proof. This is an important factor for impact measurement and scaling. Evidence can be used to quell skeptics of the lab process and demonstrate effectiveness. If evidence is focused on too early, however, it can stifle innovative ideas. There needs to be a balance in the use of evidence and developing ideas with skepticism and constructive criticism within the PSI labs field. Geoff Mulgan commented on the ambivalence of PSI labs to speak about the relationship between creativity, experimentation, discovery and evidence. It is crucial to break down this boundary and for labs dive into this subject of how to use evidence in their work.

PSI labs started with the need to address the complex challenges society will face in the future. Problems that governments and social sectors were traditionally tasked to solve are now out of their scope to address alone. In this new era of complexity, the need exists for effective and efficient innovations in the public and social sectors. The work of PSI labs has gained traction, demonstrated by the sheer number of labs globally that operate at the local, national and international levels. Lab methodology has expanded to show that there is merit to this system; there are positive results that come from challenging the status quo.

The journey is not over yet. PSI labs still have a long way to go in addressing challenges that surfaced during the Labs for Systems Change conference. As the lab network grows, governments embrace this network and citizens experience better outcomes, PSI labs will continue to do the hard work of creating widespread systems change for an improved society.

 **Claire Buré**  
@clairebure  
Labs should not be seen as the new expert system replacing the old expert system.  
#psilabs

 **Enabling City**  
@enablingcity  
In co-design, who are you empowering and how? Who stifles you if included? "Turkeys don't vote for Christmas." - @geoffmulgan  
#psilabs

 **Cameron Norman**  
@cdnorman  
We need to be humble about social change. Let's not pretend we know what the right results are - Chris Sigaloff #PSILabs

 **Jennifer Chan (Jenn)**  
@jennz  
Feeling very much in sync with @csigaloff's description of how Labs still need to define the work and that we aren't there yet  
#psilabs

 **Nico Futures**  
@nicofutures  
@zaidhassan's Dutch reply: Change isn't going to happen just because of rational evidence #psilabs



**ANNEX I:**  
**About the Organizers**

## About MaRS Solutions Lab

The [MaRS Solutions Lab](#) is a public and social innovation lab that helps tackle complex social and economic challenges that require systems change. We convene stakeholders from across society to develop, prototype and scale new solutions. And we help to build capacity for systems change through strategic advice, training and events.

Our focus is on four areas: health, food, work and learning and government. In these areas, we see systems in need of change. But we also see many opportunities to solve the challenges of our time using the problem-solving capacity of society. With people being more educated and informed, and enabled by technology to perform complex, collaborative tasks cheaply, quickly and easily. With more private capital for social good, and many people that want to create a better world. But we need to work together to develop system-wide solutions. And to succeed, we need to experiment and learn.

MaRS Solutions Lab is part of MaRS Discovery District and was created in 2013 through a generous gift honoring the remarkable contributions of Dr. John Evans, Chair Emeritus and co-founder of MaRS Discovery District. It is part of a growing global network of public and social innovation labs. And we work with an increasing number of partners to build systems for a future that matters.

## About Social Innovation Generation

[Social Innovation Generation \(SiG\)](#) is a partnership of four Canadian organizations: the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, MaRS Discovery District, the University of Waterloo, and PLAN Institute. Spearheaded in 2006 by the McConnell Foundation, SiG was a response to the growing recognition of mounting social and environmental challenges that needed to be met by Canadians who were capable of developing solutions to scale. SiG's mission is to address Canada's social and ecological challenges by engaging the creativity and resources of all sectors to foster a culture of continuous social innovation.

## ABOUT OUR SPONSORS

### JW McConnell Family Foundation

The [J.W. McConnell Family Foundation](#) is a private philanthropic organization funding programs that support Canadians in building a more innovative, inclusive, sustainable and resilient society.

### Deloitte

[Deloitte](#) is one of Canada's leading professional services firms, provides audit, tax, consulting, and financial advisory services.

### MaRS Discovery District

Toronto's [MaRS Discovery District](#) is one of the world's largest urban innovation centres, cultivating high-impact ventures and equipping innovators to drive economic and social prosperity in Canada. An independent registered charity, MaRS works with private and public sector partners to generate economic and social impact.



**ANNEX II:**  
**Reading List**

You can find the below list on the MaRS Solutions Lab website, [here](#).

### **1 // Lab Matters: Challenging the practice of social innovation laboratories**

BY: Marlieke Kieboom - Kennisland , May 2014

“Social innovation labs are ‘hallelujah-ed’ as the latest vehicles for transforming the way our cities, our schools, our welfare programs and even our economic systems run. Yet we, lab practitioners, encounter a lack of critical literature and struggle to find learning spaces to improve our practices and deepen our knowledge. The paper, Lab Matters: Challenging the practice of social innovation laboratories, aims to move beyond the current lab hype and deepen our discussions by asking ourselves tough questions. How do we ‘lab’ social challenges? Does labs’ pursuit of systemic impact miss the point? And how could we better prompt social change?”

### **2 // The radical’s dilemma: an overview of the practice and prospects of Social and Public Labs (v.1)**

BY: Geoff Mulgan - Nesta, February 2014

This reading provides an introduction to the history, structure and methods of a public and social innovation lab. This is a great foundational reading for anyone interested in the field.

### **3 // Labs: Designing the Future**

BY: Lisa Torjman - Martin Prosperity Institute (formerly SiG@MaRS), February 2012

This report provides a foundational reading on labs, with a general introduction on the international ecosystem of labs, the utility of tackling complex challenges with the lens of a public and social innovation lab, and the value that this model brings. This report is a foundational document for the creation and establishment of the MaRS Solutions Lab.

### **4 // Change Lab/Design Lab for Social Innovation**

BY: Frances Westley, Sean Goebey, Kirsten Robinson - Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience January 2012

This thought piece explores the development of a new approach for building capacity for social innovation in Canada.

### **6 // The Social Labs Revolution**

BY: Zaid Hassan - Reos Partners, February 2014

“People often ask, ‘If we can put a man on the moon, why can’t we solve global hunger?’ That very question demonstrates the fatal flaw in the dominant way of dealing with difficult social challenges: they’re treated like straightforward technical problems. Organizations do a few studies, establish some goals, devise a plan and attempt implementation. As a look around the world sadly shows, this hasn’t worked. Social labs are a more effective approach.

Social labs bring together a diverse a group of stakeholders not to create yet more five-year plans but to develop a portfolio of prototype solutions, test those solutions in the real world, use the data to further refine them and test them again. Their orientation is systemic—they are designed to go beyond dealing with symptoms and parts to get at the root cause of why things are not working.”

### **7 // Towards a Civic Innovation Lab**

BY: Various

This is an excellent collection of articles and essays on social change and the lab model. Contents include:

- Communication for Social Change
- Start-up Governance
- Democracy 2.0
- The Lab Model of Governance Innovation

The background features a complex network of thin teal lines forming various geometric shapes, including triangles and polygons. Some of these shapes are filled with diagonal hatching lines, creating a layered, architectural feel. The overall composition is abstract and modern.

## **ANNEX III: Participant Generated Resources**

**MaRS Solutions Lab Blog Post on Labs for Systems Change:**

A Global Meeting of the Minds: The Road Ahead for PSI Labs - [See here](#)

**Hackpad notes:**

Labs for Systems Change conference round table discussion notes - [See here](#)

**Epilogger created by MaRS:**

Documenting the social media presence of the conference attendees - [See here](#)

**Storify created by Meghan Hellstern:**

The Labs for Systems Change conference narrative told by participants - [See here](#)

**Graphic Visualization by Scott MacAfee:**

The key ideas from the event in this online participants perspective - [See here](#)

**La 27e Region Blog Post (French):**

Participating lab from France and their perspective on the conference - [See part 1](#) and [part 2](#)

**Re-public's Hiroshi Tamura Blog Post:**

Participating lab from Japan and their perspective on the conference - [See part 1](#) and [part 2](#)

**Map of Global Labs**

100 Social Labs from around the world - [See here](#)