



Co-Design – Same, Same or Different?

ISSUE 1

This article is the first in a series to share information, resources, answer questions and offer tips and tools to support you as you work across the Southern NSW Innovation Hub and beyond. The Hub is implementing Co-design. This is an approach to designing “with” and not “for” or “to” people. These regular articles are designed to challenge, teach, and motivate you to explore and use Co-design in your work (and it will have relevance beyond the work environment too.) All updates are written by the team of Jo Eady, a human centred facilitator, strategic designer with a keen interest in social change based in Victoria and Dale Stringer, innovation specialist and key knowledge broker with Southern NSW Innovation Hub.

A Key Question

Ok, let’s keep this real from the get go! Since working with the Hub, the most frequent questions we’re asked from facilitators, project leads and officers has been “How is Co-design different from what we’ve always done?” We’re not sure what you’ve always done with your work, so we’re not going to say that it is! We are, however going to invite and challenge you to think about how you can draw on Co-design to become more conscious about how you design projects, interactions, groups and facilitate change.

Current Context

Our interest in Co-design spans decades. It’s fuelled by an unwavering interest in supporting those in agriculture and rural communities to not only have their say, but to go the next step, to commune, communicate, collaborate, co-create and collectively improve something that they care deeply about. This can be different for each person, so Co-design provides points of time, space and place for them to come together to achieve this. It’s no longer Ok to bring people together (usually funding dependent) to have their say and not create a shared vision of where this process could go. People are genuinely consultation fatigued. The design component of Co-design means that when you design a process for change, it’s important you design beyond a one off get together consultation phase. People genuinely want to be part of an outcome.

The Role of Co-design

We love this from Kelly Ann McKercher “Overall, the primary role of Co-design is elevating voices and contributions of people with lived experience. Beyond writing on sticky notes, Co-design is about how we are being (our mindsets), what we are doing (our methods) and how our systems embrace the participation of people with lived experience (social movements).” We invite you to hit pause now and think about the following three things. And we encourage you to think about these in regards to groups you currently work with or new ones you are looking at creating.

- Your mindsets,
- Your methods and
- Your systems.

What Underpins Effective Co-design?

We hope by now, you might have started to reflect on your current facilitation and design practices and be open to learning more about Co-design. What you do (or don't do) really can change someone's world, a business, a community or an industry. We really believe this. We want to introduce you to 4 principles that drive effective Co-design. Read through these and see what you think. We've added a question at the end of each and invite you to take time to use each question reflect on your current facilitation and design practices.

POWER – power exists, and when left unacknowledged / unaddressed, it stands that those who have the most power will have the greatest influence “over” decisions and direction regardless of their knowledge. In cases we've seen, this is often a funder. Co-design allows us to share the power across research, decision making, design, delivery and evaluation. Without this Co-design is not at play. A question to ask yourself here is; Will this event / activity share power?

RELATIONSHIPS – Co-design is a social process. It relies heavily on relationships and social connections. Trust underpins this and must be earned to extend across and between the organisers, the Co-designers and the funders / investors. Only with this trust can open conversations about hard things (sometimes things that have not been talked about or through ever before) occur. Healthy social connections will see better involvement (especially with those with lived experience) better processes and hence better outcomes. A question to ask yourself here is; Are we supporting the development of trusting relationships?

PARTICIPATION – Picture a gathering of people. Where is the gathering? How is it set up? Do people have positions of power? Is there a presenter / powerpoint presentation about to happen? Co-design is about moving people from being participants to active partners. There are lots of ways for people to participate and express and share their thinking. It's not all about talking. The role of a Co-designer is to facilitate across a range of visual, oral, auditory and kinaesthetic ways. Be creative. A question to ask yourself here is; Am I providing a variety of ways for people to take part and participate – inside and outside the gathering?

CAPABILITY – It can be important to provide support and encouragement so that people learn, can express their thoughts, share feelings and take on new ways of doing things. This doesn't always come easily to people. If you are accustomed to being in an expert role, consider moving to more of a coaching role when you bring people together. Co-design is all about learning and developing together. People can learn a lot from each other, and this is to be encouraged. Of course, there's room for guest speakers; but not at the expense of wisdom sharing amongst a group. A question to ask yourself here is; Am I supporting the development of people's capability through inputs and activities in the session?

Over to You

We hope this article gives you food for thought. And that it supports you when planning your next group activity / gathering.

Comments / Further Information

If you have any comments or questions please let us know. And if you have topics you'd like to see addressed in future articles, please share them at info@ruralscope.com.au or call 0419 912 879. Feel free to share this article with those you think might find it of value too. For more information about the Southern NSW Innovation Hub please contact Dale Stringer dstringer@csu.edu.au or call 0428 409 680



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