HOW TO RUN A CO-DESIGN MEETING?

Initial co-design meetings are held to engage a variety of stakeholders and explore possible solutions to health problems. Other resources describe the importance of representing and approaching the community. This resource focuses on how to structure the initial meeting(s) to help define the problem and identify solutions.

The initial co-design process is useful as it should bring a variety of different stakeholders and potential partners who might bring innovative ideas and fresh perspectives. After the initial meeting(s), you will find a common core of people who want to work on the problem. Some people will drop out because of lack of time or resources; others because they feel the direction moves them away from their organisation's core business. Sometimes we need to re-engage people who might be critical to the successful implementation of an intervention. The initial meeting(s) will help identify those key issues and people.

We recommend using Design Thinking methodology as it provide a problem-solving approach that is human centred. It is a useful process for addressing complex (or wicked) problems that are ill defined and/or lack an obvious solution. The focus is on understanding human need and the defining and framing the problem around these needs. From here, new ideas are generated and prototypes are created and tested.

There are five stages to work through. While they are listed as if they are linear, design thinking is non-linear and sometimes groups need to cycle back and skip stages. The length of time for the initial meeting can be as little as two hours and as long as two days depending on the availability of participants. Specific activities can be created to help explore and expand on each of these stages depending on participant availability.

Stage 1: Empathise.

The first stage is to try to empathise and understand the human aspects of the problem you are trying to solve. This can involve talking to community members, people who suffer from a condition, people who provide health services for a condition, etc. We could also spend time in the physical environment with the people who are affected by the condition. The easiest way to do this at an initial co-design meeting is to have people from the community with the condition participate and share their stories. Other members can interview and explore the problem with them. The key is to really gain a deep and emotional understanding of what people experience and feel with their condition and when they access services. Additionally, we need to make sure we have sufficient information before we move to the next step. So, the planner will need to organise the meeting carefully by ensuring the right people are present or perhaps structure the initial meetings where everyone goes away to gather more information before coming back for Stage 2. Further, as we move forward to other stages, we may realise that we have to cycle back to Stage 1 for more information to ensure we have empathic understanding.

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Stage 2: Define the Problem

The focus on this stage is to analyse the information gathered to define the core problems that the team has identified. The problems should be defined in a human-centred way and not focus on what an organisation or your team needs; rather it should focus on what the individuals and community needs. The problem should be noted in a statement or series of statements. For example, one such statement might be "Elders need access to safe environments, strong social connections and health services that treat them with respect."

The problem statements should be re-worked with the input of the affected populations who hopefully are represented at the meeting. It might be appropriate to seek out additional members to ensure the problem statement is clearly understood and widely accepted.

Stage 3: Ideate

Once we have a clear definition of the problem based on an empathic understanding of peoples' experiences, you are ready to start generating ideas for solving the problem. The goal of this stage is to try and "think outside of the square" and come up with innovative ideas. The ideas should be phrased in terms of what can we do to address the problem statement. There are multiple techniques for stimulating free thinking such as brainstorming and "worst possible idea." The purpose is to encourage free thinking and possibilities and not evaluate ideas initially. After the free thinking, ideas can be explored and evaluated in order to narrow the pool of ideas.

Stage 4: Prototype

Stage 4 is about building inexpensive prototype(s) with specified features in the product or service. The group may be divided into a number of teams if there are sufficient people present to develop competing or complementary prototypes. These prototypes should involve various art supplies that can be used to draw or build the prototype. If the solution is a service, a picture of what the service might look like can be drawn with some description provided. At the end of this stage, the group has a set of prototypes that are ready to be shared and tested. These can narrowed down so there is only one prototype or test out multiple prototypes.

Stage 5: Test

The final stage is to thoroughly test the prototypes both within the group and also outside of the group. Testing likely involves a series of interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders who can identify potential limitations and constraints and also positive features of the prototypes. The results from the testing stage might stimulate additional ideas, help you learn more about the users, or needs for more information or problem definition (and hence why the process is non-linear).

References

Waloszek, G (2012). Introduction to Design Thinking. https://experience.sap.com/skillup/introduction-to-design-thinking/

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