STRATEGIC SUPPORT

**FACILITATING CODESIGN**

There’s a growing selection of locally co-designed and co-produced codesign guides and toolkits but I’m still asked questions about the best way to facilitate a codesign group.

1. Run through the process. Explain the steps to co-design. Communicate the terms of reference and any constraints.
2. Set expectations: Co-design can feel messy when you start and for some people that is uncomfortable. Support people to sit with that. Co-design includes discovery and investigation, and although the codesign process might be defined, the objectives need to be agreed. The group is not considering a proposal (that would be consultation or involvement rather than co-design) Considering/defining the issue is the very first step.
3. Be inclusive: You need a range of people to be representative. Each person is an expert in their own lived experience and one community representative cannot possibly to speak for all people. You risk being tokenistic. Community, culture and disability are diverse.
4. Be accessible: While the physical environment must be accessible, take time to think about people’s communication needs. Recognise that people have different learning and communication styles. Some people will respond differently in groups to individual activities. Always provide materials in ways that suit the co-designers and provide multiple channels for input and participation.
5. Value participants: Reward and recognition can be a sensitive topic. Have clear policy on when you will pay for participation and how much you will pay. People who directly benefit from the work derive a personal benefit. Some people may be paid by their organisation to be involved as part of their job. In these cases. Other people may participate to co-create broad social good. Some may be there for commercial benefit. Highly skilled or experienced co-designers may expect to be paid or have travel costs met. It’s up to the organisers to decide. This policy could also be co-designed.
6. Be independent: The facilitator is not a usually a contributor. The facilitator manages the group and steps through the codesign process. Their job is, keeps the session on track, stimulate conversation, ensure everyone is heard and support the group to reach an outcome. Facilitators need to use active and reflective listening to accurately capture discussions, decisions and outcomes. They may need to act as a critical friend or provocateur. You could employ a professional facilitator, or get someone from another business area who has no vested interest in the outcome to lead the process. Either way, the facilitator should be independent from the co-design process.
7. Build capacity: People prepared to share their lived experience may need support to work as a co-designer. Passion, interest and commitment is not the same as having project skills, policy experience or any other skill set you might need to be applied in the co-design process. An experienced facilitator can support co-designers to understand and use business processes as the co-design process progresses.
8. Allow enough time. Many organisations like the principle of co-design but think the practice is slow and therefore costly. In reality, the scope of the issue will determine the timeframe. While it is important to meet as a group, the frequency and duration of meetings should reflect the urgency and scale of the issue being tackled. Meetings can be virtual, there are collaborative environments and independent feedback is also useful. Co-design is the next evolution of engagement and can become just the way you do business.

If you’d like more information or some obligation free advice on your approach - get in touch info@strategicsupport.com.au