

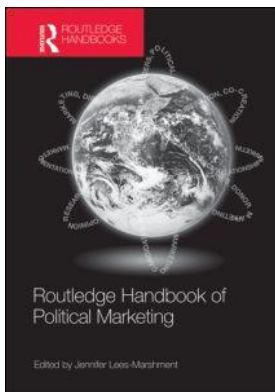
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Co-creating the future

Roy Langmaid

The topic: co-creation as a market research tool

Market research is a crucial part of political marketing, but is commonly thought of in terms of standard tools such as polls and focus groups. This chapter explores a more innovative method, co-creation, which uses a range of techniques that involve the user, or voter, in creating the solution to the problem, rather than simply voicing their demands and issues. This is more realistic because so many of our desires emerge and take shape as we become more fully aware of both external circumstances and inner motives.

Standard market research draws on the human potential movement in psychology in supporting the idea that rather than controlling the vicissitudes of desire, we should instead celebrate them and through goods and services find ways to indulge them. Politics, albeit possibly without realising it, adopted this idea of a voter as an individual customer who may exchange his vote and his taxes for the rewards of the goods and services that he covets rather than a citizen who votes out of duty and obligation or to maintain the status quo. Correspondingly political parties began to be referred to as brands (the Tory brand, the New Labour brand) and marketed in similar fashion.

Focus groups in particular had proved extremely successful in the sphere of commercial marketing – particularly in uncovering unmet needs and pathways to their fulfilment. This chapter criticises focus groups and puts forward an alternative method which addresses many of the weaknesses of market research in politics: co-creation. Co-creation takes more time to explore an issue and uses more creative and effective methods. It holds the potential to provide higher-quality information which will be more valuable to politicians and thus offers a new direction in market intelligence that political marketing needs to embrace.

Previous research on co-creation

Political marketing has not discussed co-creation, with debate focusing on focus groups (see Savigny 2007, 2008; Wring 2007) and polling. The rare exception is Scammell (2008), who wrote about the work of Promise in using methods such as role-play to create a reconnection strategy for Tony Blair towards the end of his office. This chapter puts forward an original

perspective, drawing on practitioner experience in both business and politics to explain the technique of co-creation. There are now several books that discuss relevant topics such as creativity, collaborative creativity and crowd sourcing (see Csikszentmihalyi 1996, Amabile 1996 and Sternberg 1999 on creativity; and Langmaid and Andrews 2003, Johansson 2004, Shirky 2008, Putnam *et al.* 2003, Howe 2008, Earls 2009, Leadbeater 2008, Surowiecki 2004 and Sawyer 2007 on collaborative creativity). This work is not to be confused with deliberative inquiry, which shares some of the elements of co-creation but lacks the core component – the creation of a micro-culture that allows for free expression of vulnerability, together with hidden, selfish or aggressive desires. The next section will explain the background to co-creation, the concept and methods, and illustrate it using the example of the work done for Tony Blair when he was the British prime minister.

The road to co-creation: realising the limitations of the focus group

The personal experience of more than 2,000 focus groups had pointed to some major problems with the method. The key insight was not that focus groups are not useful – for many things they are – but that in an era when diversity, modernity, competition for resources and the impact of globalisation and mediated communication were mushrooming, you could no longer rely on this kind of ‘small talk’ setting to generate any level of authenticity, depth of contact or reflexivity within the group. Reflexivity – or self-awareness – has become an increasingly important aspect of modern identities in that these are not derived solely from the traditions of parents or the indigenous culture.

Co-creation moves beyond the focus group and uses a more creative reflective and productive methodology that aims to reduce many of the weaknesses in the focus group method. If we summarise those now, they are:

- Time: the standard focus group has eight participants and lasts for 90 minutes. Without pauses, given a perfectly efficient Q&A and counting the facilitator or moderator as a ninth member, that gives 10 minutes to each person. What kind of depth can you expect in these circumstances?
- The size of the problem: if the issue under discussion is which of three opening mechanisms you might prefer for a new sauce bottle, 10 minutes is adequate, even luxurious. However, if you are gathered to talk about your life, your family, education, welfare, the evolution of our society or almost any topic that is complex, how can 10 minutes give you anything but a superficial exploration?
- The nature of the invitation: most focus groups are recruited anonymously with no prior information on the topic or the structure of the group. People show up without any prior contemplation.
- Group dynamics: most people in the group have this one, main, question in their heads through which all of their answers are filtered: ‘What will they think of me if I say that?’

There are lots of minor variations here: someone who hasn’t spoken for 10 minutes will be driven to speak because, ‘If I don’t say something everyone will think I’m dumb.’

In other words, all the participants are reacting to prompts from their inner voices based on past experiences in groups. The distortion of this kind of influence was illustrated by Irving Janis in his book *Groupthink*. Here he describes how even the most intelligent and informed people rush to consensus and form conclusions based on little evidence to avoid tensions between each other.

- Their relationship with the topic: people must have an opportunity to express what is on *their* minds, what *their* concerns are, if they are to take *your* topic seriously.
- Reduced autonomy and creative freedom: focus groups are run to an agenda that is not shared with participants. In our experience these agendas are increasingly long and full of detail. This immediately creates a dependent mindset where the group takes direction from the moderator. This in turn increases conformity.
- Mixed messages and confusion: in the hurry to get through the agenda it is impossible to know whether people are talking about the same thing in the same time frame or not.
- The embodiment problem: we live in our bodies and our feelings are first realised physically. Yet focus groups do not allow physical movement, or the cathexis of emotion and expressive responses.

So, if focus groups have so many limitations, what can take their place?

The road to co-creation: Big Talk

Big Talk was the name coined to distinguish the first co-creation process from the self-centred small talk that dominated focus groups. Big Talk had several important differences from focus groups, namely:

- It featured large groups (15–100 participants) of people talking together both in plenary and smaller sessions.
- It took place on two consecutive days, running for up to eight hours each day.
- It focused on an inspiring or salient topic in human affairs.
- It had as little power structure or fixed structure as was reasonably necessary to move a large group forward in a collaborative manner.
- It comprised more than just customers or citizens. Commercial, institutional or political people were there, staff of corporations or public services were invited, as were experts, specialists and any other instrumental or influential parties.
- All participants were invited to take the role of members of a society or neighbours in a city or country from which to discuss the topic – from personal, not professional perspectives.

This prototype co-creation process was designed to avoid many of the pitfalls and inadequacies of focus groups.

Co-creation: early definitions

This is the first definition of co-creation that emerged in those early days:

Co-creation is a methodology that involves both the producer and the customer who, together, create and build solutions, products and services that truly meet the evolving needs of all parties. In essence co-creation places the customer alongside the producer at the center of business decision making.

(Langmaid and Forsythe 2003)

Initially the tools of *pragmatism* and *empiricism* were used to develop this work in an improvisational fashion. As it progressed, a key principle underlying this approach became clear: 'Relationships are the source of results – more than what you know!'

In many ways this is just the good old-fashioned notion that building trust, empathy and shared values and experience is a good foundation for openness, trust and collaboration. Underlying this principle is our observation that humans in groups are torn by the desire both to be separate and individual *and* to join together for a bigger sense of connection and comfort. It was a key feature of our co-creation work, right from the start, that conflicting desires were allowed legitimate expression and that time and facilitation was devoted to working through these to find a higher solution.

What kind of relationships are most helpful in co-creation? There were four main types of relationships, first distinguished by my fellow co-creator, Mac Andrews, illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Most activities in the workplace or among strangers are carried out at levels one and two, the Professional and the Public. Yet the practice of co-creation has taught that a group that can move fluently between all four levels is easily the most productive creatively. It became important to develop tools and techniques to help facilitate such mobility.

Co-creation: the essential process

It's difficult to convey a meaningful impression of a group of 60 or so people working together over two days. To help get a sense of what a co-creation or Big Talk process is like, here is an outline of the process: the key steps.

- Invitation and enrolment
- Creating relationship
- Creating safety and warm-ups
- Creating permission
- Completing the past
- Creativity on the topic – exercises, techniques, demonstrations, practice



Figure 6.1 The four primary levels of relationships

- Celebrating accomplishment – the power of completion and reward
- Building and structuring the creativity
- From creativity to action (planning)
- Enrolling the community (or the organisation)

The role taken by the author in co-creation has been primarily as designer and facilitator. Now, with more than 100 live co-creation projects completed, both big and small, on commercial and social topics, it is easier to create a list of the steps followed in these projects. The way these steps emerged was empirical: things were tried, what worked was kept and what did not was discarded or amended.

Creative techniques

Whenever I talk of co-creation anywhere people are fascinated by the creative techniques. Figure 6.2 presents some of them.

Whichever techniques are used, it is important to maintain a playful non-judgmental atmosphere in the room and to celebrate and acknowledge accomplishment regularly. At least every two hours creative teams should come together to share their emerging ideas so that everyone can both applaud them and build on them. The more energy and goodwill is put into building this creative culture, the more it will flourish. This encouragement is lacking in the outside world and people are accustomed to becoming quickly discouraged, giving up and calling themselves and their ideas ‘rubbish’.



Figure 6.2 Creative techniques

Co-creation in politics: the Blair project

In February 2005 we were invited by a group of people including Philip Gould, Alan Milburn and Alastair Campbell to run a diagnostic process using co-creative techniques to understand and repair the disconnection between the UK electorate and Prime Minister Blair.

It was Nicky Forsythe, another co-creator, who came up with the idea of using ‘two chair work’ as a means of exploring in an open research session the underlying feelings about Blair and what, if anything, could be done to repair his relationships with key groups of the electorate. In the crucial session we were working with female ‘undecideds’ – women between 35 and 50 who had voted New Labour in the 2001 election but were not reconsidering and were, at present, undecided.

The interesting feature of ‘two chair work’ is that it brings a surprisingly real representation of an absent person into the room and allows individuals and the whole group to work with that person in a creative way. To start with, a volunteer is chosen to be the main protagonist in the experiment. Next, two chairs are set facing each other about four feet apart. The volunteer is asked to sit in one chair, away from the other participants, and to close her eyes and imagine that Tony Blair is sitting in the chair opposite. Next the volunteer is asked to fully experience her feelings and what she would like to say to Blair, sitting in front of her. Then, opening her eyes, she is invited to say what came to mind in the genuine and appropriate tone (i.e. with feeling) to the chair opposite. What came out took us all by surprise:

I loved you and thought you were one of us. A people person. Yet you were more interested in sucking up to people more famous than yourself. To do that you even put our boys’ lives at risk in Iraq even though more than a million people had marched against that war. Why didn’t you listen? Why are you spending so much time away from us? Why didn’t you come home straight away after the Tsunami? How could you stay on holiday when our people were dying?

The speaker finished to cheers from the group. Next Nicky asked her to move over to Mr Blair’s chair and speak as him: how would he answer? What would he say? She was given time to practise his posture, gestures, tone of voice and expressions with help from the group. Then she started:

I’m afraid you’ve only got part of the picture. From where I sit the war in Iraq was crucial to the cause of world peace. But I understand that it’s difficult to see the whole thing for you [boos from the group!]. You put me in charge and I must do what I think to be the right thing. I am sure that history will prove us right in the end.

Next Nicky solicited reactions from the volunteer and the whole group. Everyone felt that the volunteer had provided an accurate representation of her own feelings and Blair’s likely response – and that they were dissatisfied with that. Then Nicky asked the volunteer to go back to her chair and speak again as Mr Blair, who this time was saying what she really needed to hear: this is what emerged:

I understand your feelings and realize there are many who do not agree with me over Iraq. I realized this as I listened to more and more people over the past months. I still believe that on balance we did the right thing, though I have been shocked to appreciate the depth of frustration among those who disagree. I solemnly promise to spend more time at home

in contact with our own people and to debate these issues more seriously before we launch on such an endeavour again.

In many ways the difference between the two Blair responses is not huge, but the first is patronizing and justificatory while the second remains open to the expression of disagreement and other points of view. In the view of the women this was crucial: they felt heard by the second Blair, not by the first.

In other words, a reparative response which owned the fact that there had been a breakdown in both relationships and agreements and that Blair was committed to repairing and attending to that relationship was needed to reconnect the prime minister. This reflection and commitment became the basis of his speech at the Sage Centre in Gateshead on 13 February 2005, and was reported on the BBC with the words:

Well, if a romantic weekend in Gateshead – at the classiest venue in town – can't fix a troubled marriage, what can? And, as Tony Blair acknowledged on Sunday in his closing speech at Labour's spring conference, he has plenty of fixing to do.

(Wheeler 2005)

The very next day on the front page of the *Sun* newspaper (which has 8 million primary and secondary readers), a St Valentine's Day card with a heart with the following words emblazoned on it read: 'You think I'm not listening. I think you're not hearing. You raise your voice, I raise mine and some of you throw a bit of crockery'. Slightly less flippantly below, the writer kicked off with:

Tony Blair last night made a Valentine Day's plea to Britain to fall in love with him again. Blair admits that his journey has taken him from being 'all things to all people' to 'I know I'm right' and that he has now arrived at 'we can only do this together'.

(The Sun, 14 February 2005)

As ever a consummate communicator, Blair was able to appreciate the distance that needed closing between him and frustrated and disappointed female voters – and to offer an olive branch along the road to reparation. In the seven weeks remaining until polling day on 5 May, the support among females intending to vote Labour increased by four full percentage points.

At the core of this example is the idea of working *with* people and taking on board their concerns rather than *on* them by deciding what would be best for them and announcing it. This is the crucial distinction that underpins co-creation and offers supreme value to politicians who must inevitably negotiate choppy seas, divided opinions, frustrated voters and disaffected supporters.

Advice for practitioners

To explain what works, this section will propose a political example and the practical steps in how to do co-creation.

Invitation and enrolment

What idea would most excite you to come and share your views and ideas? How about this: 'Come and help us build the future for a better Britain. For the first time, ordinary people, who

belong to no interest or power group and who represent our diverse and multi-cultural society, are gathering together for two days to co-create a design for a better future.’

Or this: ‘They say that a Big Society is the answer; that we need to come together and take responsibility for making things better. This is an opportunity to form a prototype of that Big Society with 50 others drawn from all classes, races, geographies and cultures. For two days we will co-create a Better Britain together. Will you come and take part?’

Enrolment and attendance

However exciting or promising the invitation sounds, there will be doubts and hesitation among those to whom it is issued. Even before this point there is the problem of who should be invited. So, we face the issues of who to invite and how to encourage their attendance.

There are a few important considerations from our experience of co-creation projects here:

- The more naïve the group, the richer the co-creation will be.
- Two days is a lot of time to give up in modern life; you may have to start with one-day events and introductory evenings to whet appetites and dispel doubts and concerns about selling and manipulation.
- Experts should be in the minority. They should not have any more power in their opinions than anyone else.
- We need to consider the question of incentives. In commercial projects we pay cash to ensure attendance. In political or business forums, the advantages of networking or the proximity to power are often incentives to attend. It is necessary to avoid engaging only those with interest in power or lobbying. We need naïve members of the public to ensure authenticity.
- Experience has shown that cash is the cleanest incentive. Everyone gets the same, and it can be presented as an honorarium to cover expenses, which to some considerable extent it is. It is also more generally acceptable to naïve attendees and these are crucial to success.
- Co-creation, like any form of creativity, is meaningless unless the results find an audience. As the well-known writer on creativity Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi points out:

Originality, freshness of perceptions, divergent-thinking ability are all well-known and good in their own right, as desirable personal traits. But without some form of public recognition they do not constitute creativity ... Therefore it follows that what we call creativity is a phenomenon that is constructed through an interaction between producer and audience. Creativity is not the product of single individuals but of social systems making judgments about individuals’ products.

(Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 314)

- Thus it is vital to give participants a clear understanding of how and via what process their ideas might see the light of day or be input into further development. The tendency of politicians only to attend to people and their needs while seeking their votes is well known. All are sceptical of politicians’ ability to keep them in mind once in power. Co-creation can help to close this gap.
- As far as possible everyone should speak from ‘I’. It is their personal speaking that we need, not their ability to quote from learned texts or statistics.
- Everyone in the room has something in common – they live in the society that we are trying to improve. They all have both personal and social needs. These are often in conflict

and this must be introduced early. People have already devised ways of working through these conflicts: what are the techniques already available in the room?

The next part of enrolment is *setting the scene*. This is the first session of the co-creation workshop itself. Usually this is done in a theatre-style layout with curved rather than straight rows of chairs. We are trying not to look too regimented in approach.

Once everyone is seated a facilitator introduces the session by welcoming everyone. Next, people are reminded of the purpose of gathering here in the form of the objectives of the session and told a little about how they will work together.

The main forms of engagement will be:

Plenary sessions

These will tend to begin and end each topic and the workshop overall. In these we will get together as we are now as a large group and people will be invited to describe anything that has had an impact on them in their experience and to reflect upon insights, discoveries or puzzles. These sessions will not be debates; we will take it in turn to offer our perspectives if we have something we wish to make public.

Individual work

We may ask you to venture on your own into an exploration. We might ask you to go out into the locality with a topic in mind and notice what you see that throws light or perspective on that topic. We might ask you to draw or compose something that expresses a subject. We might do a creative visualisation.

Group work

This will happen in twos, fours, eights or any other appropriate size of groupings for the task at hand.

Large group work

We may create tribes or teams to look at diversity or conflict or competition for resources or ascendancy.

Whatever the style of work we will feedback to the whole workshop so that we all learn together and have the advantage of each other's progress or the benefit of knowing that we are not alone with a knotty problem. The essential fact here is that all knowledge quickly becomes the resource for the entire group.

Creating relationships

Our thesis is that people do not or cannot bring all of themselves to a creative process because fundamentally they are torn by conflicting desires and do not wish this turmoil to be seen by others. Not only are they worried that others might see it, but we all find it makes us self-conscious while we are speaking from one side of ourselves whilst denying the other. In these circumstances it often seems best to toe the line or say little.

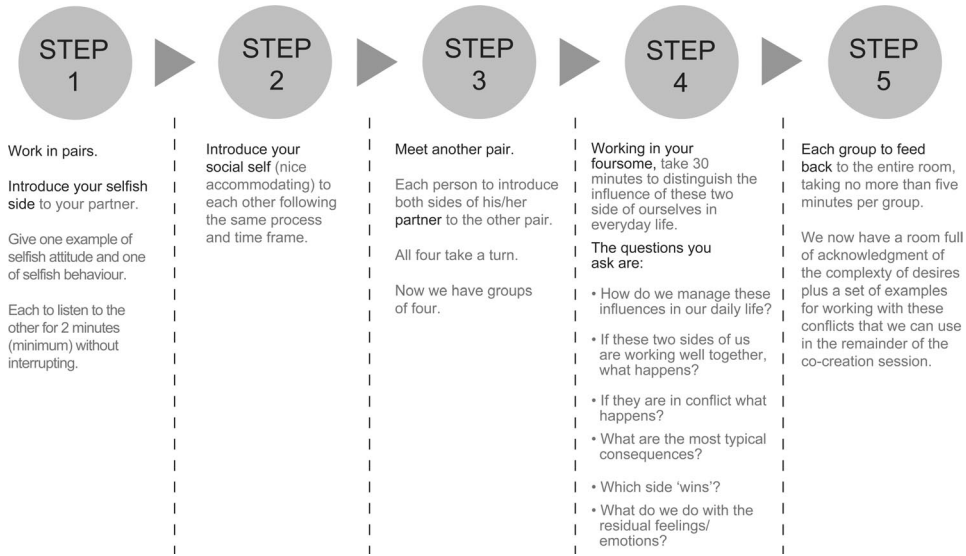


Figure 6.3 Creating relationships

Figure 6.3 shows the process that we developed in our past co-creation programmes. A good idea is to use flip charts once foursomes have been formed so that people can note their discoveries as they go round the group. The purposes of this session are fourfold:

- We immerse people quite quickly in engaging with the selfish and social sides of their natures through participation with everyone else. All are in the same boat. At the same time the exercises are short and simple. You only have to speak and listen for a little while.
- We subtly train people to listen and report accurately on what others are saying. Taking responsibility for introducing your partner in his/her presence ensures that people are doing that. In the instructions each group member is encouraged to correct mistaken details in their partner’s description of them.
- The idea of splits and divisions as a normal part of living is created in the room and normalised. Everyone has these parts. We don’t need to spend the rest of the session pretending we are straightforward, nice or tough people.
- The groups work together to examine the consequences of these splits and the workarounds that individuals have constructed to help to manage them.

Having fun with our different sides

Now it’s time to play with these sides and allow them to express themselves creatively. Here is a typical exercise that we might use to embody these distinctions and let people practise them:

In groups of eight, your task is to invent a game that has never been played before, that you can demonstrate to us in five minutes. Your game must include an instrumental role for both the selfish side and the social sides of us. In other words you must have to use both to win. The game must have a name and you have 15 minutes to do it.

The purpose here is to give the group both instant practice and a successful experience of co-creating from an open brief in a very short time.

Creating safety and permission

Usually the task of creating permission – in other words of expanding the social and personal possibilities for people within this group – is accomplished by these opening procedures. If not, there are a variety of things you can do to expand permissions.

Safety is another matter. We're not talking about physical safety here; the sense of safety with which we are concerned is fairness – that everyone has the opportunity to make their contribution without being bullied, put down or scorned by others.

Completing the past

Most of us simply do not realise day to day the influence that the past has on the future. This influence is so great that much of the future is already written – it is waiting to happen based usually on what happened in the past. The efficiencies of habit, adaptation and routine make it so. We are prone to doing it the way we did it last time. It is like the drift or current of a great river running through our lives that we cannot see if we look only at the smooth surface of the water. Unless we take into account the effects and strength of the current we cannot hope to get free of it. We must distinguish its nature and force for co-creation to be able to step outside of it.

Let's imagine that our workshop is tasked with the development of a useable, affordable, high-quality co-creation programme for the electorate and politicians to engage together in designing policy and practice. In such an event a suitable topic for completing the past might be:

Let's imagine that this workshop never happened and that things carried on pretty much as they are today. Let's think about the future, say two years from today. What will have happened? How will the relationship between the general public and politics be two years from now? What will people be saying? What will be the story of the day in the news? What will have changed?

If you have time, project a little further forward to the next election. How will that be? Use the same sort of framework: i.e. 'If we carry on as we always have, change nothing, what will be the main themes and emotional climate of the election, five years from now?'

This exercise is best done in groups of not more than eight. Ask each group to use a flip chart to list the features of the outcome they predict based on the past. Once the exercise is complete, each group has a couple of minutes to feedback its findings to the whole room.

Creating a clearing

The essence of the clearing created by completing the past is simple. Once the feedback has happened, everyone is no longer standing in the flow, or floating in the river to maintain the metaphor, but is standing on the bank, outside of the water. The minute a mindset or 'groupthink' loses its grip then it is possible to create something new. Now, before the current re-asserts its grip, we must put some new information into the room and launch a creative session. One of the central struggles for politics is that people are so cynical and sceptical about politicians and their self-serving agendas that it is vital to complete the past to create any new possibilities in this arena.

We don't need to look too far for this new information. We already have some from the creating relationships exercise.

*Creativity on the topic***Setting a creative brief**

In co-creation projects the brief is always set in collaboration with the sponsor of the project. We have imagined our brief as we would wish it to be and in so doing mention some of the problems we find in live briefs. In our theoretical co-creation session, the group has learned that our natures contain fundamental conflicts. The creative task here is: to find a way of doing politics, making choices and decisions, that takes account of these conflicts, includes and manages them. Managing conflicts and finding workarounds is such a part of everyday life that we must include it in our co-creation processes if we are to reflect reality.

Structuring creativity

After several hours, usually working in teams of up to 10 individuals, you will have a room packed with ideas. The first thing to do is to have a feedback session where all of the ideas are shared with the whole group and made available for everyone to build with/work up. Then, after a break to let the energy settle, it is time to build the ideas into a complete manifesto.

Ideas occur at different levels. There are ideas that are visionary, that seek to change the world, others that are about process, doing things differently to make things better, others that are about product features or details, small improvements that can make a big difference, like say the courtesy light that stays on for 15 seconds when you close the car door or being able to renew licences online. Even more detailed are ideas to do with guarantees/promises that affect delivery and what people can count on in this respect. In other words there is a wealth of ideas and a series of different domains or levels of human activity where they may have an effect.

We noticed that these levels are not completely discrete; they are and must be allowed to be interlocking, much as a political manifesto needs to cover the main domains of society's activities and concerns. This interlocking hierarchy is what came to be called the Total Communications Technology. A series of five interlocking levels of expression for an idea that

Table 6.1 The different levels of ideas

<i>Level</i>	<i>Desired effect</i>	<i>Example</i>
Vision	Inspiration	'A world where no-one goes to bed hungry'
Stand (commitment)	To call to others, rally support	'I will not eat or drink until the fighting stops' [Mahatma Gandhi]
Proposition	To enrol customers, stakeholders, funders	'If you can find a better offer we'll give you your money back'
Menu	To excite prospective customers and allow them to see what they will get	A list of services and ingredients like a menu in a restaurant – each with some well-crafted description to attract interest and desire
Delivery	To show that you aim to deliver, and how	A timetable, coupled with a commitment to measurable results and budgets – and including a review process

permitted the proponent of the idea to talk about it, both to a front-line worker operating at the level of transactions or to a CEO who wished to impress the City with his vision for the future.

In any project or set of ideas these were the crucial elements that needed to be present to assure both communicability and capability. If an idea cannot inspire, enrol and propose well, it is unlikely to excite and sustain interest. If an idea cannot be viewed as a menu of things that can be delivered according to a plan, it is unlikely ever to happen.

We all understand these levels and the distinctions contained within them, but each of us is practised in some and less skilful at others. That is why so many ideas do not see the light of day, or get distorted and diminished between insight and implementation. The well-known Belbin typology used in business acknowledges that any team that wishes to make things happen needs to feature people skilled in different elements of the process.

To illustrate their qualities and their commonplace occurrence in everyday life, there is a set of film clips available online that shows each of the levels in action (see www.langmaidpractice.com and links to VSPMD movies). This is helpful because many people react to this matrix as if it is unnatural, complicated and difficult to use, without realising that they use it every day: they just have not put it all together!

After the creativity sessions, it is crucial that the co-creators work in new teams to select the ideas they are most inspired by and subject them to formulation in this or a similar matrix. As well as fleshing out the complete hierarchy from inspiration to delivery, this formulation process will also encourage condensation of the ideas into words and phrases that can be said in a moment.

From creativity to action (planning)

Many people do not have much commitment to detailed planning. This is especially noticeable in a group that has spent a number of hours building relationships in order to create together. Planning – and indeed to some extent building the VSPMD matrix above – requires convergent energy rather than the divergent energy of creativity, together with a high degree of condensation of the sort in which copy writers and editors are skilled.

Because of this, we usually recommend another day for planning, some 7–10 days after the creative work. In this detailed session, plans and projects are designed that answer the questions, ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘when’, ‘how’ and ‘how much?’

Enrolling the community: the listening programme

One of the most powerful elements of co-creation and its process is the amount of time and value given to the activity of listening. The listening programme described below can be rolled out as far as is necessary. It is very hard for people to sustain objections in the face of a better argument if their opinions have been heard. Here, the co-creators seek out those with strong opinions and vested interests within the domain of work, be it health, education or social care, and arrange to listen to 20 or so prominent figures from the relevant domain. These interviews should be recorded so that content analysis can point out synergies between these views and the co-creation and highlight differences that need to be resolved or aligned. It is important that those selected to be listened to are given a similar brief to those who participated in the co-creation sessions – so that they focus on the same sorts of big questions and also bring their experiences and preferences to bear on providing some detailed ideas and answers.

It is extraordinary the degree of correspondence and agreement that emerges between the pure co-created ideas and those of experts and pundits in the field of inquiry. In many ways we

all want the same things but are reluctant to share our viewpoints for fear of ridicule. We have, after all, created an oppositional system where power and incumbency rather than ‘the force of the better argument’ (Habermas) hold sway.

Once the results of co-creation are completed, after the listening programme it is time to write up the findings in the form of a description, analysis and recommendations for the vision, commitments and menu of possibilities for the project.

The impact on politics

Co-creation, conducted and revisited regularly, provides an ideal tool for keeping up to date with the preoccupations, concerns and needs of the electorate and a means of fostering genuine engagement and input into policy and politics. Co-creation is not just about using a more innovative market research method. It holds the potential to change the relationship between government and the people. Its central idea is to work *with* people rather than *on* them to find solutions. This kind of collaborative activity is the future. Just look at the rise in academic papers mentioning co-creation on Google since 1990, illustrated in Figure 6.4.

I am grateful to my friend and colleague, Dr Nick Coates, for this piece of analysis. The collaborative spirit of co-creation is reinforced by allowing time for possibilities to emerge and evolve rather than reacting to a pre-prepared set of ‘options’ as is so often the case in standard research methods – even if they do include the minister’s favourite! Time and again our work has shown that if such a favourite is a great idea it will emerge from the group.

When you consider that any new administration is full of elected representatives who may never have run a large department, let alone a country, who have only a partial picture of the vested interests of different elements of the community and have not considered how the

Co-creation’s come of age

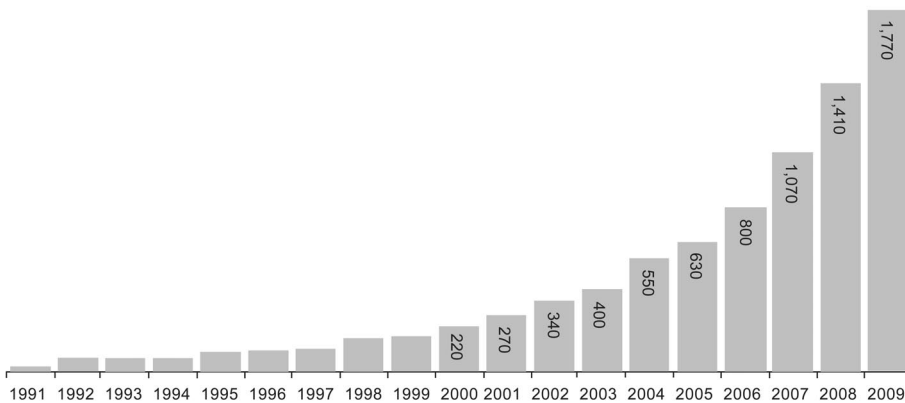


Figure 6.4 Co-creation articles in Google Scholar 1991–2009

political consequences of decisions might play out on the larger stage, it is only too obvious a methodology to bring light where currently there is ignorance and at the same time to allow experience to the inexperienced. Above all, it is a forum where creativity and innovation can shine and politicians can get a real sense of the winds of opinion, desires and fears blowing through their communities. It is also a place to witness the conflict between expert and lay opinion that underlies so many policy issues in modern societies.

Not only does it move away from the idea that elites know best, but it moves beyond the idea that politicians find out what people want and then develop a product to give it to them. Instead, politicians and public are both creators of the solution. If adopted more widely in politics, it could potentially transform citizen–state relationships and increase trust in politicians, as they will be no longer expected to find the answer to everything.

The way forward

One of the laments of the political classes is that the electorate is detached or dissociated from politics. That is largely because politics seems to take place at such a distance and uses a discourse ('the Right Honourable Member ...') that is incomprehensible to most of us. Co-creation offers a practical, even inspirational means of solving this problem. Policy-making, fact-finding, conflict resolution, allocating priorities can all be done together.

Political marketing needs to conduct further research into the use of more innovative research tools, especially co-creation, and be open to new forms and approaches beyond the simple focus group or poll. Politicians and governments should consider using processes that are co-creative, as it would help them to develop more positive long-term relationships with their public as well as better policies.

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