COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY

"Co-creation works because even the greatest creative rarely knows the complete answer."

John Williams,
co-founder of WikiSolutions

DISCLAIMER

Edited by CO-CREATE, an initiative of six partners committed to supporting the creative industries sector across Europe: Creative Region (Austria), University of Art and Design Linz (Austria), Academy of Fine Arts and Design (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia), Deusto University (Spain), Creative Industry Kosice (Slovakia) and the European Creative Business Network (The Netherlands). This document has been elaborated by Denisa Draganovská, Martin Kaltenbrunner, Barbara Predan, Aiur Retegi, Brigitte Sauvage, Gisa Schosswohl, and Enrique Tomás.

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Hello there!

You are a creative professional and want to learn more about co-creation? Perfect! If co-creation is still a buzzword for you, if you have heard or read about it, and you want to know if it could benefit your work this guide is also for you. Perhaps you want to participate, lead or even run co-creative workshops or projects. It might also be that you already do co-creation and you'd like to improve your skills or find additional material to use in your projects. In addition this guide could be also interesting for you if you'd like to introduce a new way of collaboration with your team or with outside partners.

This guide to co-creation explains

1/ Why co-creation
2/ What is co-creation
3/ What are the benefits and challenges of co-creation
4/ 8 key principles for successful co-creation
5/ 4 key steps in co-creation
6/ How to prepare a co-creation workshop

We would be happy to hear about your experiences after using this guide! We are curious to learn about the challenges you were facing or solutions you came up with.

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1 / Why co-creation?

As a creative professional you might work within a company or organization or work for them. You might solve people's problems, create meaningful experiences or you might help people realize their goals.

Today, organizations need to respond better to demands of their (future) customers and users. Therefore organizations need to collaborate more efficiently within and with the outside world. Thus, they are in need of skilled creative professionals to guide their co-creation processes and help them spread this mindset throughout the organization.

Through a structured collaboration and exchange process with users, co-creation favours empathy and boosts creativity. It brings in a deeper knowledge of end-users and other stakeholders needs and challenges. It also diversifies knowledge and widens views on the challenge to be solved, leading to solutions relevant for the users. Solutions that might potentially be even better than any stakeholder could have achieved on its own.

Thus, this collaborative process of co-creation also increases the credibility of the proposed solutions when shared with the client or project promoter. And last, but not least, co-creation is fun.

2 / What is co-creation?

Co-creation is actively involving end-users and other relevant stakeholders in a (design) development process. Co-creation connects all relevant parties affected by a particular challenge while building on equal cooperation.

A key concept of co-creation is that users are experts of their own experience. For this reason, co-creation means mutual learning between all relevant parties. It is particularly useful in connecting end-users and creative professionals while developing new products, services and systems.

It is important to stress that co-creation moves much further from usual involvement of users as sources of data. In co-creation users are actively participating in shaping the future together. To put it differently, co-creation is build on the concept that the research and design work is NOT done ON BEHALF OF the user, but WITH the user.

> **Co-Creation Expert tip:** Co-creation is often used as an umbrella term for participatory design, co-design and open design. Don't get confused by the terms, simply start doing.

3 / What are the benefits and challenges of co-creation?

#1 Relevance

First of all, co-creation enables everyone involved to be an active agent of change. Meaning the design of future solutions, products, services etc. is not limited anymore to specific groups of people but everyone, like users, clients, employees, designers can take an active part in. **Thus, their needs and experiences become more relevant.**

Co-creation provides

- more opportunities to discuss and reflect with stakeholders involved
- new and enriching perspectives
- value and a new way of engagement for all parties involved
- means to unlock the creative problem-solving capacity

#2 Connection

Second, co-creation helps to better connect all relevant dots between different parties, organizations and across disciplines

Co-creation enables

- all stakeholders involved to form links and networks more easily
- better collaborations by breaking down silos
- equal collaboration with all stakeholders
- a strong commitment by all parties involved, to create value for the user

#3 Motivation

Third, a co-creation process fosters motivation for all persons involved.

Co-creation leads to

- more inclusive outcomes, as individuals who do not normally have a 'voice' get heard
- higher engagement of everyone who participates, due to distributed responsibilities
- a high level of enthusiasm of the professionals involved
- increased openness in regard to innovation and change

#4 Efficiency

Fourth, co-creation helps to create solutions that better fit user needs.

Co-creation improves

- the risks of failure, as know-how of user needs is improved
- the credibility of the outcome
- the development process as concepts can be evaluated faster

#5 Results

Fifth, co-creation has a strong focus towards realization and implementation.

Co-creation results in

- an immediate evaluation of ideas or concepts.
- more focused and differentiated products, services or systems.
- the development of a new business ideas and models.

Co-Creation Expert tip: Start documenting your co-creation process with photos, videos or scribbles from the very beginning. Capture not only outcomes, but atmosphere as well. This will provide you with great materials to show these benefits to your clients.

#6 Co-Creation Challenges

Despite all the benefits, co-creation can be challenging for creative professionals to manage, as

- it typically involves of a large number of stakeholders;
- you might face different personal characteristics of stakeholders and complex relationships;
- you need specific skills to manage collaborative development process
- you might be confronted with resistance to change or disbelief that an users can bring value to the process.

In order to overcome these challenges, we have shaped 8 key principles to success-fully co-create.

Co-Creation Expert tip: In case you ever get stuck or don't know how to solve a challenge, simply reach out to the co-creation community. People working in co-creation typically like to share their experiences and give advice.

4 / 8 key principles for successful co-creation

In the document "CO-DESIGN: BEST PRACTICE REPORT" we've detected a number of guiding principles. It is important to stress that the following guiding principles always depend on the individual project and the context. Nevertheless, we believe when engaging in a co-creation process, there are eight key principles for success:
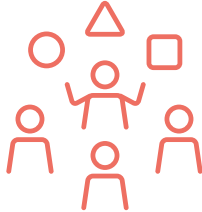
#1 Skills of the facilitator

Co-creation needs a well-trained and skilled facilitator (= experienced coach) who is able to set up and guide the process.

The facilitator needs to have an open attitude, boost and support creative participation, find the adequate methods to support co-creation, be able to create a safe space and let people feel free to contribute in their own way. Facilitators need to be clear on what they expect from participants and how their efforts are made visible.
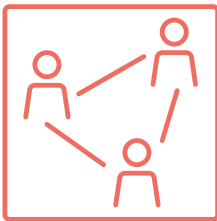
#2 A healthy environment

An inspiring and open setting is crucial for sharing thoughts and developing ideas. But it is just as important to have a clear structure.

Structure applies to content, space, time frame and even (if visible) rules of participation, as well as to the flexibility to adjust procedures during the co-working process whenever necessary.

In co-creation, co-working and co-participation, problems like precariat and exploitation can be present. Questions of transparent management and money distribution should be part of the open discussion within the group.

#3 Diversity of the team

Co-creation is inclusive, or should rather be non-exclusive. The co-creation process should involve all relevant and necessary persons.

It is about the representation you aim for, don't (only) go for the obvious. It's about people in a broader sense, not only about users or customers. Participants should be seen as 'active agents' rather than 'beneficiaries'.
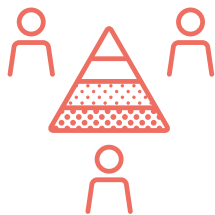
#4 Clear needs & shared pains

Co-creation is a strategic choice, has strategic consequences and invites multiple perspectives.

In order to successfully co-create, a clear definition of the needs of the target group, the background, aims, targets and tasks is essential. Anyone is an expert in their own right – by balancing professional and experiential expertise, a level playing field is created.

It is also important to learn how to communicate needs and pains. This is the basis to build empathy by understanding individual motivations.

#5 Common vision & shared values

The aim of co-creation is to create shared value and a common vision – together with your stakeholders during the co-create process.

Co-creation is an open and constructive process, where (process and/or outcome) control is shared. Co-creation thrives with shared ownership – in both results and process.
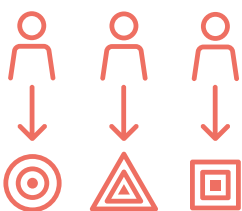
#6 Individual roles for individual goals

The co-creation process is an art to involve stakeholders at the right stage of the process to ensure a positive outcome.

Co-creation is open-ended. Keeping stakeholders involved during the process and later on, giving feedback on the choices you make, shows esteem and builds trustworthy relationships.
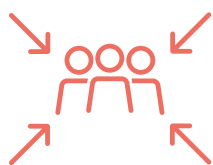
#7 Handle conflicts and interests

Co-creation is about collective creativity: in a creative process, a different dialogue between people is started. That's why setting up a process to avoid conflicts and varied interests, or acting spontaneously when conflicts pop up, is very important.

Also, from the start it's not about finding the right idea, it's actually about finding needs and a multitude of ideas. It's also about open and respectful feedback. Conflicts might, however, also be a tool of the process to create space for a more open communication. Conflicts help to find out what really matters to oneself or others.

#8 Reflection and evaluation

It's not enough just to get feedback on the choices made afterwards, but also to evaluate and reflect on the whole co-creation process. This can provide important data for the following stages of co-creation or the next project.

Also, evaluation should be long-term – following up on the results and new project developments. Projects are open ended, it is therefore important to keep an eye on their development.

5 / 4 key steps in co-creation

| ENGAGE | UNDERSTAND | IDEATE | VALIDATE |

A co-creation process can be structured in different ways and it can use various activities to engage with its participants. However, there are typically four key steps at every co-creation project:

#1 Engage

Learn from each other and set the challenge

- Become experts of the challenge in question. Thus, it will be necessary to gather as much information as possible about the status quo, about the involved stakeholders as well as their interrelations.
- After this phase participants of your co-creation process will understand the challenge better and obtain a new degree of sensibility about the possible issues involved.

> **Co-Creation Expert tip:** A good start paves the way for successful co-creation. Try hard to understand people's expectations and hidden agendas.

#2 Understand

Focus on user needs in order to gather key insights for each stakeholder

- Discuss and acknowledge the other personal points of views to define a clear set of needs and goals. These needs and goals will be the starting point for developing any solution.
- Facilitate communication and engagement among participants first. Then it will be important to facilitate activities to create a common understanding of what a good solution "for all" would look like.

> **Co-Creation Expert tip:** People are hardwired to solve problems, which makes it hard to find the right problems/needs first. Introduce a idea parking lot (a simple flip-chart works fine), were you can park any ideas that come up for the next step.

#3 Ideate
Co-create design concepts and build prototypes

- In a nutshell, it is about brainstorming ideas, clustering and prioritizing them by active involvement of all participants

- Take into consideration the need of finding a consensus for defining criteria and filtering out groups of ideas, which do not fit the needs. Among the rest, participants choose and prioritize the top ideas.

- For the top ideas, create storyboards and rapid prototypes.

> **Co-Creation Expert tip:** In the beginning aim for quantity and diversity of ideas. Tell participants that you will filter them in a second step. Then, start prototyping quickly in order to learn if it creates value.

#4 Validate
Present, test, evaluate

- The goal of this step is checking the validity of the ideas or concepts.

- Testing your prototypes first in a small group of stakeholders, later to all involved parties. The goal is to collect as much feedback as possible. Does your solution resonate with the actual needs defined by stakeholders?

- Facilitate the reception of feedback. Questionnaires could bias a participant's opinion. But often open feedback sessions are not honest enough. Find the adequate feedback communication channel.

- Validate your ideas from obtained feedback and evaluate the co-creation cycle. Repeat this process if necessary.

- After implementation, track the ongoing results of the product, system or service produced and evaluate the whole process.

> **Co-Creation Expert tip:** Let the stakeholders interact with your prototype, instead of just presenting it to them.

6 / How to prepare a co-creation workshop

A co-design workshop is a common format in co-creation. In a workshop people work together on a certain challenge and iterate the co-creation cycle until finding a suitable solution. A good workshop is well prepared and has the right stakeholders participating.

#1 THE STAKEHOLDERS

A stakeholder is any person, group, or organisation that, positively or negatively affects or is affected by a particular project, product, service or experience.

Identifying and involving relevant stakeholders is essential for a co-creation process. The following questions can guide you to identify and mobilize those in successful co-creation processes:

- Who are the people we necessarily have to involve at specific design phases of our project?
- How can we attract clients, users, and customers to freely contribute with value to our products?
- What are the limits of collaboration within particular social groups? When is co-creation still an efficient practice for my social and professional scenario?
- How can we deal with power relations (often hidden), which already exist among stakeholders?

> **Co-Creation Expert tip:** As soon as you know how many people are involved in a certain workshop, make sure that the location is big enough. Book a room for double the number and you will have enough space to move around.

#2 THE FACILITATOR

In order to run a great co-creation workshop (or any co-creation project), good preparation and skilled facilitators are essential.

As a facilitator your main goals is to help a group of people to understand their common objectives and help them achieve the goals. Thus, you need to provide participants with the right methods and tools.

Key responsibilities for a facilitator are:
- Manage the overall process.
- Define a clear schedule and goal.
- Establish the right conditions for people to feel safe when stepping out of their comfort zones and embracing the process.
- Build a shared understanding of the problem.
- Set the tone: manage conversations and encourage participation.

- Shape behaviors and mindsets that lead to more creative and thoughtful solutions.
- Seek inclusive solutions that work for everyone with a stake in the outcome.

> **Co-Creation Expert tip:** Make sure to have the agenda somewhere visible in the room, so participants know whats next. Allow for flexibility in between, but consequently stick to break and end times.

#3 METHODS AND MATERIALS

Multiple methods and co-design toolkits are available freely. Choosing the right methods can contribute significantly to conducting successful participation processes in a structured and efficient way, providing variety and interest, and tracking down new solutions away from well-trodden paths. (For more on the topic of Useful tools for different co-creation workshops and process see *The Co-design Handbook for Creative Professionals*).

It is also important to stress, that a great variety of materials positively supports the development of co-design projects. These materials (post-it notes, paper cards, cardboard models and other modeling materials like LEGO bricks) enable participants to engage easily and share their needs and ideas.

Make sure to print out any copies well in advance and test technical equipment before the workshop starts.

> **Co-Creation Expert tip:** Never underestimate the power of coffee and snacks for successful workshop outcomes. Thus, offer at least some basic catering.

#4 THE CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP CHECKLIST

We have compiled a checklist on how to prepare co-design workshops:

- **Know your participants before the workshop**
- Ask your stakeholders to send you a resume of their expertise and working field. Avoid having one group entirely made of participants sharing the same professional profile.
- **Prepare your tools, methods, location and materials in advance**
  There are a multitude of methods and activities, but they have to fit participants' expertise and expectations. Remember that the location and its facilities define radically the healthy atmosphere and the degree of participation in the workshop.
- **Prepare your participants before the workshop**
  Send information about the workshop, the goals and agenda. Set expectations and let key players know why there presence is important.

- **Prepare a clear brief in advance**
  Decide on the scope of what you're asking people about co-create. Make sure the activity is achievable. Otherwise some participants will automatically lose interest and the general atmosphere of the workshop will be affected.

- **Master the backbone methodology**
  Decide on the most appropriate design cycle methodology you will use in the workshop. Many methodologies follow the typical cycle of divergent ideation and convergent decision. You may use one you have already experienced.

- **Define a facilitation strategy**
  As facilitator, you are responsible for creating a great learning experience for people new to co-creation and co-design. Actively encourage participants to roll up their sleeves and learn by doing.

- **Establish workshop policies**
  You may decide if there are particular rules to follow. For example, your workshop can have a "no device allowed policy".

- **Documentation**
  Define before the workshop what needs to be documented and how this will be done. Typically pictures are sufficient, but sometimes you need original files to work with them later on.

- **Plan excursions and networking sessions**
  They are great to engage with others' expertise and to create new networks and relationships.

And now, let's co-create!

If your are interested to learn more about co-creation, on our website **www.cocreate.training** you can find:

- a handbook on how to prepare co-create workshops
  (especially Train-the-Trainer workshops)

- a brand-new curriculum to create co-design courses

- examples of co-design in best practice report

- and many open learning materials on co-creation