

Innovation and ideas development – a summary

April 2010

Introduction

Innovation, and specifically the space to explore and develop bold new ideas, has been an objective of much of the London Collaborative's work since its inception. From ideas evenings, to workshops on practical methods we have looked at some of the most compelling challenges facing London today and run sessions to generate new ideas and collaborations which might go some way to addressing them.

This paper rounds up our work in this arena from May 2009: it includes three innovations methods, each introduced to the London Leadership Network and explored through a practical project targeting a pressing social need. Below we outline:

1. highlights from the three projects for Leadership Network members;
2. reflections on what worked; and
3. where next - wider lessons for London's public sector and its innovation capacity.

Our report *Innovation in tough times* captures our thinking on innovation in the public sector and offers a range of insights from the substantial experience of the Young Foundation in this area and from elsewhere. It was first presented in October 2009 and the final version is available in April 2010.

Short reports on our practical workshops are on Network-London along with videos.

1. Work on innovation from May 2009

In spring 2009, at the start of phase two of the Collaborative, we looked back at the work of the last year and concluded that more could be done to improve London's capacity for innovation. Our analysis was that there is no shortage of good one-off examples but public services need to embrace a more systematic approach to innovation, learn about and use a wider range of methods, and develop support for risk taking. Above all, innovation needs to be grounded in a deeper understanding of citizen's lives.

We started with two ideas evenings to explore this thinking on innovation, held in June and July 2009. We do not cover these events in detail here as they are summarised in the *Innovation in tough times* (October 2009) paper. During the autumn we quickly turned to designing a series of projects combining a method for innovation and a pressing need. These were:

- User Journey Mapping and the challenge of youth unemployment;
- an online ideas bank and the challenge of an ageing population; and
- SI Camp Express and the challenge of resident responsibility.

User Journey Mapping and the challenge of youth unemployment

We commissioned *live/work*, a service design agency, to conduct a user journey mapping exercise in Bexley, mapping out the services provided to young people by Resources Plus, which provides careers advice, training and work placements to improve work prospects and employability.

Participants in our workshop at the Design Council (1 December 2009) were given an overview of the methodology and how user journey mapping can be incorporated into improvement processes to generate innovative approaches. Participants were also shown a video on Faking It (a Young Foundation programme that rapidly trains a group of young people over a two week period in a real work setting) as another illustration of how innovative thinking can be brought to bear on persistent problems.

“Good levels of creativity and a desire to innovate. I liked the method.”

Participant

Participants discussed the insights from the user journey process and other information and shared what was going on in their own authorities. They then worked in small groups to develop some new ideas on aspects of youth unemployment important to them.

Online ideas bank and the challenge of an ageing population

An online ideas bank was set up on the Network London website for members of the London Leadership Network to post their ideas on how to deal with the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population.

An ideas bank is a space, either physical or virtual, where people can put forward ideas, which are then advanced by decision makes. There is potential for the public sector to harness innovation from internal and external sources through this method, challenging the assumption that innovation is hierarchical or top-down.

Network members were provided with case studies from around the world to stimulate thinking and Geoff Mulgan, Director of The Young Foundation, provided one idea. His idea was to “mobilise an army of volunteers” willing to attach a visible green flag to their car indicating to older or disabled people, who often struggle with public transport, that they are willing to give them a short lift. A number of other interesting ideas on ageing and social care came out (e.g. Tyze – a Canadian web-based support system).

We were disappointed that not many network members participated, despite wide advertising. This likely reflected the need to log-in to the dedicated Network London site, which at the time had few regular users.

SI Camp Express and the challenge of resident responsibility

The Social Innovation Camp team ran SI Camp Express for London Leadership Network members, providing them with an overview of how innovation can be stimulated through the coming together of service providers, and potentially citizens and businesses, to rapidly come up with ‘itches’ and look at how these could be ‘scratched’ using web technology.

Participants generated 53 'itches', out of which four of the most popular, which fit the criteria of shifting responsibility, were chosen: how councils grit pavements in periods of ice and snow, how to assist isolated older people, tackling the problem of badly placed pedestrian crossings and utilising vacant spaces as public spaces.

"The social innovation camp was a really useful method. The ideas generated were fantastic! If we got citizens in the room I wonder what would happen."

Participant

Addressing four questions on what the problem is, what technology could be used, how the solution will be sustained and how to get people to use the product or service, participants came up with four web services: Snow-Go, Adopt an Older Person, Safe Crossing and OurSpace.

2. Reflections on what worked

Did we fulfil our objectives?

Our primary purpose was to increase the London Leadership Network's (LLN) understanding of what innovation is, how to foster it within their own organisation and some of the techniques for developing new ideas.

Overall, more than 50 LLN members took part in the three projects. As the videos at www.network-london.org show, people have certainly been engaged by the opportunity to learn about and try out new methods. The projects attracted more practitioners from service areas than other LLN events. Participants valued the hands-on experience of tools and techniques for rapid generation of ideas and potential solutions.

What worked really well?

91% of those at the user journey mapping session thought the project was good or excellent and 98% of those at the SI Camp Express event said the same. In their own words, participants noted:

- "Very lively, practical, relevant and inspiring."
- "Visual presentations (video and posters) really explain journey mapping as a method well."
- "When we're given the time and space to step back from the daily grind, innovation can actually flourish!"
- "It was good to work on ideas with new people from different places."
- "Good ideas generated and useful methods that can use elsewhere."

What didn't work as well?

The ideas bank initiative did not produce useful results in part because Network London is not sufficiently well established, with enough traffic on the member site, and in part because it may have been on too small a scale. Successful 'calls for ideas' are typically large-scale, international and communicated to thousands of people and their networks.

Some participants found it hard to engage with the more theoretical elements of a framework for innovation methods. The Young Foundation has now published the *Open Book for Innovation* (February 2010) which catalogues more than 500 methods public servants can employ to generate, incubate and spread innovative solutions.

In their own words, participants noted:

- “How likely are these ideas generated in today’s session likely to be taken forward?”
- “Low participation of BME participants - I wonder why? Does this reflect the background of people who are working in this field in London?”
- “It’s hard to get one’s point of view across! Are there creative ways that thoughts could be captured?”
- “I’m not sure what happens next. There is a need to understand what the outcomes of this workshop will be.”

3. Where next?

Over the next few years local government and partner agencies face unprecedented pressure to cut costs whilst social needs look set to rise. ‘More for less’ must be achieved without jeopardising public confidence – meaning a new dialogue and relationship of shared responsibility will be needed between citizen and the state. These challenges are set against a backdrop of rapid change, where we cannot rely on tried and tested solutions. Though there are lessons to be learnt from the recessions of the past, there is no blueprint for how public services should act now. All this means London’s public servants will need to not only better understand social needs, but also the methods for identifying new ways of addressing them.

The Young Foundation’s ‘end to end innovation’ spiral was used in the London Futures Challenge programme, where we also used service design and ethnographic techniques. The outcomes of our innovation workshops were fed into this and other Collaborative work. At the chief executives’ retreat in March 2010, ideas on ageing (like the Tyze project mentioned above) were mentioned and explored, and there was significant discussion of risk and how public services had to overcome this barrier to innovation.

Participants at the events highlighted five areas which would help build the capacity of London’s public sector to innovate:

- ***building a systematic approach to innovation:*** otherwise individual projects/pockets of innovation will continue to come and go unnoticed. Approaches can include A teams, secondments between organisations, Social Entrepreneurs in Residence, innovation funds or more collaborative pan-London work
- ***strengthening collaboration:*** there is still some competition and wanting to own or copyright good ideas/projects, but this can be overcome, or we should just ignore/work around it.
- ***understanding methods for innovating:*** there is still a lack of useable materials in this field. However, participants noted that many of the ideas and methods were not new but just described in a different way, e.g. customer focus and citizen centred services have become co-production. Techniques like user journey mapping are seeing a renaissance – it is not necessarily awareness of these kinds of methods but making them happen at sufficient scale to make a difference, which is patchy.
- ***more opportunities to learn from others:*** local government and other public services have a significant national infrastructure for sector-led improvement and sharing best practice yet, some new and proven ways of doing things better can still seem to take a long time to spread.
- ***making the case for innovation:*** participants acknowledged the need for senior and high level champions to strengthen support for innovation and investment in it. Innovation is likely to yield long term gains, the majority of performance regimes are based on outcomes in years one and two. This mismatch can lead to some authorities disinvesting in innovation. Participants were unsure whether the crisis will make this more or less likely.

A key message is that we need to step up and improve London’s capacity to innovate, and that this can be done. At present, there is no shortage of good one-off examples but we need

to embrace a more systematic approach to innovation, learn about and use a wider range of methods, and develop support for risk taking. Whilst more tools for innovating are emerging, understanding of the methods of innovating and their practical application remains uneven.

*Young Foundation for London Collaborative
Apr 2010*