

Capturing the “How”: Showing the value of co-design through creative evaluation

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Abstract: Evaluation is undertaken for various reasons from helping to ensure that objectives are met to identifying success. This paper examines the significance of creative evaluation in a co-design approach. We have identified a major gap in appropriately embedding evaluation into engagement and consultation processes. The study explores the use of evaluation to evidence the value of co-design and consultation. As a part of this we have established a broad framework to gather information and data to build a portfolio of evidence to evidence the difference we are making. From the initial studies we have identified findings that are significant and shared across our partners within their evaluation practice. Throughout the project, our evaluation is embedded in our process. We have proposed an evaluation process, and an evaluation framework which will be used at various stages of the project to capture evidence. At each stage we capture the impact in a meaningful format so it is visible to communities and the researchers, in turn making evaluation a collaborative process. For this purpose, we developed a creative evaluation approach which is innovative, engaging but also designed in an unobtrusive manner.

Keywords: Creative Evaluation, Co-Design, Engagement and Evidence Gathering

1. Introduction

There is an increasing demand for approaches that improve engagement with communities, driven by the need to better involve citizens in decisions that affect them, underpinned by legislative imperative. In addition, communities themselves are corralling around common agendas and need tools to help inclusive engagement. Tools for consultation which are not only engaging but also effective and efficient would help radically improve this landscape, especially for “hard to reach” communities, where engagement is not easily facilitated. In situations where designers are involved in working with participants for product development a relationship emerges between the designer and the public. During this situations



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the users accept roles as experts and the new designers role is to support (Ehn, 2008). With grass roots, bottom up social innovations where the emphasis is on a public led approach to design, designers are demonstrably serving as triggers for initiatives, their role being to activate and facilitate civic creativity (Lee & Ho, 2012).

Despite the increase in engagement and consultation, capturing the value of engagement between the public sector and the communities with which they work is critically important but unfortunately rare. To justify the necessary resources there is an increasing need to better demonstrate the return on investment of such approaches for purposes of transparency, suitability and effectiveness of the chosen methods, as well as articulating impact better.

To address this challenge, Leapfrog: transforming public sector engagement by design, is a £1.2million Connected Communities project funded by the AHRC. The Leapfrog project is working in close collaboration with public sector and community partners to design and evaluate new approaches to consultation. (see www.Leapfrog.tools). Delivered through a partnership between ImaginationLancaster at Lancaster University, and the Institute of Design Innovation at The Glasgow School of Art. The project is working initially with communities in Lancashire and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and then more broadly across the UK Leapfrog will help create and evaluate new tools and models of creative engagement.

This partnership was brought together to ensure that the tool development and implementation is tested in challenging circumstances. Lancashire has closely packed overlapping communities that are hard to engage, e.g. with low rates of English literacy. The Highlands and Islands communities are very geographically dispersed and isolated (i.e. hard to reach physically) and as such are strongly motivated to innovate by the difficulties they face in terms of communications and access. Working across these two locations and their “hard to reach” communities will stress test these new consultation approaches and help make them more robust when applied in other parts of the UK. Leapfrog will also address the challenge of integrating creative evaluation into these tools and approaches such that the value of this engagement and the impact it generates can be suitably captured.

2. Why creative evaluation is needed

Evaluation refers to judging, as when we need to express the value of an object or an action (Scriven, 2007; Farrell et al., 2002). In other words, we address evaluation when we need to decide about actions in which we are an active part, but also when we need to comprehend or verify the value of something. In doing so, we analyse all the information that is available to us and the conditions at play.

Within the field of social studies and community development, when we talk about evaluation we refer to a systematic assessment based on certain methodologies and procedures which review and ensure the legitimacy of the results (Ander-Egg, 2000). Fournier (2005) defines evaluation as an investigation process that aims to gather and synthesise data in order to develop conclusions. For him, conclusions have two dimensions, the veracity of something and the value placed on something. It is the value aspect which differentiates evaluation from other kind of investigation. In an evaluation study typically we hear stakeholders' value (things stakeholder consider to be important).

In recent years, the so-called third sector has shifted from a positivist perspective of understanding social change to a convoluted and complex view of the world in which systems are in continuous change such as culture, economy, demographics or politics (Kelly, 2010; Lacayo, nd). Practitioners in this area have realised that social change is not governed by linear rules in which implementations lead to predictable outcomes. This issue therefore also needs to be addressed by evaluation practices, including an understanding that social relationships and interactions are extremely important for success. All these factors are inherent in the complex environments and complex contexts in which communities live and operate.

As Barnes, Matka and Sullivan (2003) state, evaluating complexity means assessing “complex community initiatives” (Connell et al., 1995) which aim to produce an impact in different levels within individuals, families, communities, organisations and systems (as Knox, 1995; Sanderson; 2000). The key concern for Leapfrog (and indeed any evaluation of collaborative approaches and community endeavor) is the outcomes (goals of the community development initiatives) for evaluating complexity. The outcomes cannot be pre-determined because of many factors, such as emergence, nonlinearity, uncertainty, adaptation and constant change, interact simultaneously. This uncertainty has led to a shift in the role evaluation plays in the social sector. In past decades, there were rarely evaluations in community development, often for the lack of time or resources, and others for distrust (Kahan and Kael, 2008), or they were extremely limited (restricted to reviewing activity). More recently effective evaluations are requested internationally and locally, largely influenced by the need to show a return on investment, particularly during the recent recession (Forss, Marra and Schwartz, 2011). These demands have highlighted the lack of effective evaluation methods, to effectively address the challenges that community development entails. The social system consists of many components (Fitzpatrick, 2012) and the success of social change depends on the nature of its relationships. Hence, the system cannot be controlled and barely described by using cause and effect approaches (Preskill and Gopal, 2014). Kelly (2010) subscribes to this view due to the unique factors and history of each system. In fact, he states that evaluation is a crucial element of transformation in community development when is applied thoughtfully and intentionally.

A further consideration is that to create relevance and effectiveness, evaluations cannot be implemented outside the community (Cousins and Whitmore, 2004). As Kelly (2010) avers, designers need to get involved into the system and become “an engaged and trusted participant”. Similarly, Fitzpatrick (2012) encourages designers to expand their knowledge about evaluation by looking beyond their disciplines and local contexts to learn how others define and take into account context. She states that context is other key factor when conducting evaluations (Stake, 1974; Stufflebeam, 1971; Weiss, 1972). Thus, there is a gap for studying in depth the role of context in evaluation. Of these, Greene (2005) defines context as the set of environmental conditions under which what is evaluated and the evaluation itself is located. Greene also states that context is multidimensional such as demographic and descriptive; economic and material features; institutional and organisational. This is extremely important when considering evaluation of approaches for community engagement, where external factors can have a major influence on success. The role of context changes according to the evaluation approach. In experimentalist evaluation, context is understood as an influential element, but external to the evaluation process, to be under control. In theory-oriented approaches, context is something that is going to happen and can be observed to explain changes. In qualitative approaches to evaluation, it is an intrinsic factor within the evaluation because “decontextualised information loses its meaning” (Greene, 2005). While in participatory approaches to evaluation, context is the focus and therefore the scenario in which to promote a social change. As can be seen from the above review, evaluation in this area is in need of improvement in approaches and methodologies in order to better capture the evidence of value in this complex environment. It is this exploration to which Leapfrog aims to contribute.

3. Co creation - What we have been doing in Leapfrog

3.1 Co-Design

According to Sanders and Stappers (2008), participatory design is nowadays renamed as co-design or co-creation. These approaches originated in the field of business and marketing. Co-creation is a term first introduced by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) within management. They used it to define a shift in the business model, from a centred-view to a customised-view of products. Tseng and Piller (2003) talk about “mass customisation”, and von Hippel (2005) co-creates only with what he calls “lead-users”. This is criticised by Sanders and Stappers (2008) because they doubt the assumption that the “lead-users” represent all sectors of society.

The proclivity of a co-design approach to accept multiple perspectives and work with a wide range of stakeholders has seen it applied in contemporary society to address our current social and economic challenges. We find the approach often applied to areas such as policy design, environmental design, systems and services

(Sanders & Stapper 2008). It is generally agreed that in order for co-design work to be done successfully we (the designers and citizens) need specialist tools to broker the relationships between designers, stakeholders and products, and that these tools allow stakeholders to ‘invest the world with their meaning’ (Illich, 1975). There are challenging spaces in the collaborative approach to design that recent literature has identified. Namely the fear of tokenism and the aim to appear inclusive and collaborative (Lee, 2008), some assumptions that co-design is driven by expert user input (Von Hippel, 2005) and that the process requires a power shift or at least a relinquishing of some control that flies on the face of an established centralised expert based mind-set. The inverse of these criticisms could describe the central tenets of co-design approach: that everyone can play an active role; power is dispersed and lateral; civic inclusion is essential.

3.2 Leapfrog

The Leapfrog project works closely with public sector and community partners to design and evaluate new approaches to consultation through co-design. In Leapfrog, we are working with various partners from the remote “hard to reach” communities of the Highlands and Islands to the urban Lancashire communities. Partnering with ImaginationLancaster, Lancaster University and The Institute of Design Innovation at the Glasgow School of Art, we are developing and evaluating new models and tools, working initially with communities in Lancashire and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and then more broadly across the UK.



Figure 1 Non-written Consultation tool. Tools that enable people to contribute ideas and opinions without the need to write. These tools are used in communities directly by our partners to facilitate group work.



Figure 2 Creative evaluation tool to gather stories. Left - prototype of the Creative Evaluation Tool developed with our partners through co-design as part of a short project to gather qualitative data through stories. Right- Final version of the Creative Evaluation Tool packaged, assembled and ready to be distributed to the partners.

Within the Leapfrog project, we are currently developing and testing various engagement tools through co-design process as part of short projects and major projects. Working with communities and public sector organisations requires flexibility and agility. Short projects allow us to experiment and respond quickly to opportunities. Examples of ongoing short projects include Non-written Consultation [Figure 1], Make-it Stick and Gathering stories through Creative Evaluation [Figure 2]. These projects look mainly at developing tools through creative co-design workshop with range of public sector partners who were looking for practical assistance in developing new approaches for their consultation needs.

The Evaluation Game tool [Figure 2], is an outcome of one of our short project which provides participants an opportunity to reflect, discuss, share personal stories and experiences to feed into a collective evaluation. This tool has been adapted and used by our partners from Public Sector Organisation and Third Sector Organisations. Our partners have identified that the Evaluation Game tool helps them to categorise what was working, why, what could be better and help generate ideas for future improvements. With some partners the game was used as part of evaluating a training session offering a practical example of a way to creatively collect information.

Major projects involve more in-depth co-design and tool development processes. Through major project we aim to achieve a deeper and longer collaboration with our partners. Current major projects are specifically exploring Peer to peer Community Engagement in the Highlands and Islands, and Working with Young

people in Lancashire. Each project works closely with partners to understand their evaluation needs, limitations and challenges with delivering projects within their respective communities. By doing so we also explore the preferred indicators and measurements that are currently in place with regards to stakeholders and their motivations for these measures.

Evaluation is at the core of Leapfrog. We aim to find measures that these public service providers look for when assessing the efficacy of their services & interventions, and also indicators that evidence the value of the consultation/ collaborative process. While we explore these methods we also aim to understand the relationship between the partners and what difference these collaborations bring for impact. Throughout both the short major projects, evaluation is embedded in our process. In order to assist with this unique approach we developed an Evaluation framework that will support evidence capture to address our research questions.

4. Evaluation- some challenges

As previously identified in the literature study, there is a major gap in embedding evaluation within research projects which looks into community engagement and consultation process. In Leapfrog, this is a major research theme. Through evaluation within Leapfrog we aim to capture evidence of change for different audiences and across different levels of analysis [Table 2]. The Table [Table 2] indicates the proposed evaluation process, and shows how the evaluation framework [Table 1] will be used at various stages of the project to capture specific aspects that will be meaningful to both our partners and researchers.

Table 2 Proposed Evaluation Process for Leapfrog Partners

1st substantive meeting)	Tool Delivery: Evaluating	1-2 Months after tool delivery: Evaluating	6-8 Months after tool delivery: Evaluating	24 Months after tool delivery (or as close to as possible): Evaluating
Base Line Tool	The (co-) design process	Any initial impacts	Comparison with the baseline tool evaluation, any changes?	Comparison with the baseline tool evaluation, any changes?
(Baseline questions described below)	The predicted effectiveness of the outcomes	How the tool has been used	Have the tools been adapted, how and why? Have these adaptations themselves been adapted?	Have the tools been adapted, how and why? Have these adaptations themselves been adapted?

		The effect on (positive or negative) engagement	How have the tools been shared, who has used them? How are they being employed?	How have the tools been shared, who has used them? How are they being employed?
		Have the tools been shared, to who, how, have they used them?	Is the tool still being used or seen as useful?	Is the tool still being used or seen as useful?
		Have the tools been adapted, how and why?	Any new skills developed or other effects of being part of the process?	Any new skills developed or other effects of being part of the process?
		Any surprises?	Any organizational effects	Any organizational effects
		Ownership ?	Any changes in behavior?	Any changes in behavior?
			Imagine if there had been no Leapfrog, how would things be different?	What has changed between now and the 6-8 month evaluation?

Our Evaluation not only focuses on measuring the final outcome (Did we, and our partners, achieve our outcomes), it also looks at which tools and approaches were most effective (What worked, what didn't, how efficient etc), but also the softer, more qualitative elements, including the benefits of greater trust, collaboration and co-creation and also the process of change (how this happened). Overall Evaluation Captures:

- **The Why:** Did we achieve the objectives of the research programme that we set out to explore. In addition, did the partners we worked with achieve their objectives, this could range from to enable better engagement, to reduce cost and to inform policy more effectively.
- **The What:** Which tools did we develop and how suitable were they? Which worked best in which environments. Were they easy to implement, and easily shared. Did the evaluation process work seamlessly with the engagement process? What difference did this make to the group and the individual, as well as the partner/stakeholder?
- **The How:** We are developing these tools through co-creation, and some of them will be further developed and adapted beyond the immediate implementation. Working in collaboration to achieve this is a core part of the Leapfrog project. Capturing the level of partnership which can help show the how

these relationships have matured and deepened to allow better and deeper engagement.

In addition, the ambition of the project is to make these evaluation processes engaging, such that communities themselves are active participants in the evaluation process. It should be remembered that evaluation is not audit, but instead should be all about learning and informing future delivery and approaches.

Previously, evaluation approaches have followed traditional methods such as surveys, focus groups and interviews. While such approaches are structured and capture key evaluation data, their appeal and effectiveness can suffer from not providing an engaging experience for participants [Preskill et al. 2015]. Also, they risk turning good indicators into definitive targets, which then become unrepresentative under a ‘tyranny of measurement’ [Merry, 2011]. In Leapfrog we are exploring the use of evaluation through new frameworks of co-design and consultation. They are intended to capture the effects of impact in a format meaningful to research and communities making evaluation part of the collaborative process. Our evaluation framework aims to be creative, innovative and engaging; and aim is to design unobtrusively within our consultation tools.

There are other elements within evaluation that need to be considered, including scope, context, causality and the balance of qualitative and quantitative measures.

- **Scope:** When undertaking an Evaluation, both the scope and focus are important. Is the evaluation narrowly focusing on an individual tool or an individual project or is it considering more broadly? For example, evaluating across number of projects to see what we learn from tool development.
- **Context:** The different context between the two research locations and their different “hard to reach” communities are precisely what is being explored in the Leapfrog project. As such the project is developing and delivering solutions for community consultation and engagement in urban environment such overlapping communities that are hard to engage, e.g. with low rates of English literacy and also Highlands and Islands which are physically hard to reach communities. This will be our fundamental part of the research partnership.
- **Causality:** A key challenge for any evaluation of a complex and multifaceted endeavour is to evidence causality. Whereas there may be evidence of change, showing that this change is because of a certain intervention or approach is extremely difficult. To address this Leapfrog is aiming to gather a basket of evidence, which is sometime a better approach when there is not an easy linear connection. By gathering points of data and also telling human stories the evaluation can show that the leapfrog tools have made the difference.
- **Hard measure on soft issues.** In dealing with softer issues such as communication and engagement there is often the temptation to focus on the story telling. However sometimes identifying indicators of change that can show

improvement over time, and particularly if they can be quantified in some way, can be a powerful communicator of that change. As such the evaluation develops “Hard measures on soft issues”. We need the mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. To help guide this Leapfrog is using the analogy of meringues. The initial starting point is soft (the egg white) but through the right treatment (whisking and cooking) and with the right tools, over time this can create something hard and substantial (although essentially still soft at the centre). We have termed this development of hard evidence over time as “meringification”.

Another key element of good quality evaluation is consistency and knowing the starting point. As such Leapfrog has established a broad framework within which to gather evidence, even in tailored interventions such that data gathered helps to build a portfolio of evidence to address the research questions.

4.1 Evaluation Framework

The Evaluation framework [Table 1] is divided into three overall evidence themes, which are:

1. Evidence of the difference in the process: Have the tools led to a different approach, with new and diverse people involved, and with different energy and engagement?
2. Evidence of the difference in the result: Through using the Leapfrog tools has this led to new, better, different outcomes and impacts for those delivering the engagement and for the ambitions of the communities involved?
3. Leapfrog Learning: Evidence of the effectiveness and usability of the tools. Also how transferable were they and how adaptable?

Table 1 Evaluation Framework

Evaluation Q	Evidence of:	Captured by:
Difference in Process	Change in approach	e.g. change from before
	Deeper wider engagement	e.g. who involved
	Better use of capacity/ resources	e.g. cost benefit, ROI for numbers etc
	Enjoyment/fun	e.g. level of engagement, feedback, observed energy
Difference in Result		

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	Outcome quality	e.g. Previous experience of engagement, length of time, with who, frequency success and failure.
	Ownership of outcome	e.g. who engaged with next steps
	Legacy/sustainability	e.g. drive to take forward
	Surprising outcomes/emerging effect	e.g. additional benefit (better community relationships)
	Change in behaviours/attitude	e.g. better engagement, less negativity etc.
	New skills/capability	e.g. individual benefit and group capability
Leapfrog Learning		
Focus on tools	Usability	
	Adaptability	
	Mutation	
	Passing on/ripple	
	Building deeper tools?	i.e. our own adaptation of previous tools?
Focus on Research Questions	Can we develop tools with embedded evaluation?	
Other learning (for us)	Gaps (need for further research)	
	Surprising outcomes	e.g. importance of the ability to cook/eat for research!
	Value of Design	

This evaluation framework underpins all our actions, from co-design to innovation in local consultation to widely distributed toolboxes. This framework is used to understand the real value and impact of the new tools that we develop as part of the projects. By establishing a framework, we enable diverse data and information to be collated and analysed coherently across the portfolio of projects. This evaluation framework is designed to be unobtrusive and to examine activities in terms that make sense and are seen as valuable to communities. Rather than evaluation being something that is 'done to' communities this will also be a collaborative, mutually beneficial shared process.

5. Conclusion

Leapfrog is at an early stage of delivery with the initial tools now being used in the field and available for sharing. We are currently in the process of undertaking our creative evaluation for these tools. More results and learning will undoubtedly emerge over the coming months and years. However, it is already understood that the project has developed learning for evaluation and evaluation approaches.

From the initial studies we have identified findings that are significant and shared across our partners within their evaluation practice. Early findings are:

- There is a need for creative engagement especially for evaluation emphasised by our partners during our initial studies. Such creative engagement has allowed people to reflect on their experience in a way that is comfortable and accessible for them
- Creative engagement tools gives meaningful data when they are clearly linked to your outcomes.
- The need to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative, and exploring ways to combine the two (through “merging”)”)
- The need to make evaluation engaging and enjoyable encouraging participants and users of the tools readily contribute to the evaluation process
- The need to have a structure such that even as each individual project is designed and co-designed, there is a consistent evidence gathering framework to coordinate and make sense of evaluation evidence.

The findings we have presented were gathered from our initial studies that gave us in-depth understanding of our partners’ evaluation needs and challenges. The tools we have developed will attempt to address these issues. The findings suggest that creative evaluation is necessary for Leapfrog to gather basket of evidence to tell the human stories that shows that we and our partners have made the difference.

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