10 Ways to Leverage Human Insight in Collaborative Innovation

Discovery

Experience Interviews. Create an interview guide and have decision-makers and working group participants interview others in the system, especially the constituents they want to help. Remember that interviewing is about developing an empathic narrative of people's whole experiences through words and images; it's not about trying to help or develop solutions.

Storytelling. Human experience is about narratives, not numbers or analysis. Have participant "Context Experts" share their stories (be sure to provide prep and support if you do this) of their lived experience with the issue, which might be living in poverty or living with diabetes. Ask participants who conduct interviews to share the story of a typical day of someone they interviewed.

Journey Map. What is the journey that a homeless person goes through each day trying to get food and a place to sleep? Based in your interviews, create a map of this journey, including the points at which the person makes contact with service providers and what they really feel and experience at those points. If they avoid contacting service providers, include that in the journey map as well as missed connections.

Role Play. When done with sensitivity and based on real experiences (versus imagined ones), role play can be powerful emotionally and analytically. Have participants set the scene, introduce the characters, and play out the experience of someone living in a difficult situation.

Experience Modeling

Force Field Analysis. If your initiative needs certain actors (whether doctors or people with diabetes) to change their behaviors, it's helpful to map the "force field" that's preventing them from adopting the change. To do this, create two columns on a flipchart, labeled Forces For (or Tailwinds, as we call them) and Forces Against (or Headwinds). Under Forces For, list all the factors that are attracting those actors to adopt the new behavior. Under Forces Against, list all the factors that are preventing those actors from adopting the new behavior. Identify the 3 strongest forces in each column and develop strategies to strengthen or weaken the forces to change the force field.

Key Shifts. Key shifts simply show the current experience of a person or group on the left and the desired experience on the right (in western countries, at least!). Because they focus on experience, not solutions or analysis, they help ground solutions in human reality. After all, if someone's experiences haven't changed as a result of your work, then things haven't really changed.

Personas. Personas are like archetypes with real personalities. They represent distinct types of people who experience the same challenge differently, and they help us avoid a "one size fits all" approach when designing solutions or services for diverse populations. A persona should have a photo, a name, and information about that "person's" unique way of experiencing and responding to, for example, offers of help with finding a job.

Prototyping

Experience Prototype. Create a working model or full-size experience of the desired experience you want people to have, and have people walk through it. Use Legos, construction paper, or life-size installations to help people experience how your solution will work in the real world.

Storyboarding. Storyboarding is used to develop everything from movies to games to apps. Use stick figures if you can't draw and captions to describe the scene, and put scenes in a series to walk through a whole experience. You can use post-its in small groups or repositionable glue on large sheets for larger groups. Have one person walk through the story scene by scene about how your proposed solution will work.

Role Play. While it can be used to understand people's current experience, role-playing can also be used to explore how a solution might actually work in the real world. For example, when role playing around a program to encourage parents to read with their children, the actors in the parents' role can play out the real-life challenges of parents who work two jobs and come home just in time to put their kids to bed.

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