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CO-CREATION ...

13 MYTHS DEBUNKED



LANNOO
CAMPUS

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CO-CREATION ALLOWS ME TO
BID FAREWELL TO A TRADITIONAL
HIERARCHICALLY ORGANIZED WAY
OF WORKING.



Martin Ruebens



FOREWORD

Some time ago a friend died, one year after being diagnosed with cancer, at only 40 years of age. During his last year he kept a blog about the course of his illness and about his responses to messages from his body. He observed his illness as if it were his reflection in a mirror. He did not fight with his illness, for it proved itself to be unyielding. On the contrary, he established a dialogue with his illness and with his body's messages in response to treatment as a means to explore what the process taught him about himself. He shared all of this with his friends and blog readers. When the inevitable moment arrived, he left his life and his illness as if he was departing from a dear friend.

Just after he died I was searching for a suitable approach to introduce radical change within my organization. I wanted my leadership to be connective in the process. When I read about the basic principles of Large Scale Co-creation I recognised parallels between what my friend had written in his blog and the reactions of those who had followed his blog.

I admired how my friend had taken leadership over his illness and over the process of dying, which must be the ultimate process of change for a human being. Obviously, his clear goal was to recover. But most of all, he strove to deal with the process of change in an authentic and dignified way, in balance with his body and with the impact the changes had on his partner and those close to him. He let go of what he could not control, but at the same time he was totally committed to the healing process. He did not fight the cancer, but tried to understand the deeper meaning of its presence and then to explore it from different perspectives. This gave him the energy to cope with his pain and suffering. It also gave those around him the energy to support and look after him.

He gave everyone involved in his healing process the space to assume responsibility and to participate, but not without occasionally checking that their participation resonated with his authentic way of reaching his goal.

I remain deeply impressed by my friend's great show of leadership! His example led to my choice to put my trust in the basic principles of Large Scale Co-creation and to apply them in my own organization. This trust allowed me to discard the traditional, hierarchical team structure in which we had worked and to replace it with a team structure based on self-organization and network cooperation. The application of these principles has made us more efficient and flexible and has given the staff more space to organize their own work. Co-creation has contributed to our service becoming more customer and solution oriented. We now deliver the quality of service to which citizens, companies and administrations are entitled and our employees have become more committed and more satisfied with their work.

Martin Ruebens

Secretary General, Department of Chancellery and Administration
Flemish Government

TWENTY REASONS NOT TO APPLY CO-CREATION

1. We have other priorities.
2. We are not ready for it.
3. People do not want it.
4. Such a process takes too much time.
5. I cannot be sure it will be effective.
6. We are not used to it.
7. There will be problems if the results are not what we thought they should be.
8. It is too difficult.
9. My position as manager may be in jeopardy if others are given control.
10. What do these other people know about it!
11. Let sleeping dogs lie.
12. It will be abused.
13. We need results now. Tomorrow is too late.
14. It does not suit our culture.
15. The boss will allow people to have a say, but he will make the final decisions.
16. Involving the unions is asking for trouble.
17. You cannot take the opinions of the general staff seriously.
18. I dare not allow it. If the genie gets out of the bottle, we may never get it back in.
19. I want to stay in control.
20. I could never convince the others to do this.

However, are you a manager who:

- hopes to delegate more to his people in the near future?
- dreams about more committed people?
- finds it difficult to bridge differences of opinion between people?
- wants to involve everyone because you firmly believe you need everyone, but you don't know how to actually do this?
- is in favour of change, including change driven by the employees?
- wants to prevent “resistance” caused by changes?
- has an eye for the complexity of matters, but is unsure how to deal with the complexity of an all-encompassing approach?
- is searching for practical ways to interpret “shared leadership”?

In that case, co-creation is just right for you!



STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

We can imagine that you are itching to get started with co-creation. But we ask you to be patient and to take the time to fully understand what co-creation means. We do not encourage the use of co-creation for “quick fixes”!

Part I is about the principles and theories of co-creation. In Part II we share our stories: we bring co-creation to life by describing our own experiences in dispelling the myths associated with co-creation. In Part III we share lessons learned from our everyday practice and the tips we have collected to help you on your way. Part IV consists of final considerations. If you are not quite ready to dive into co-creation theory, you can skip Part I and go straight to Part II. We are, however, convinced that at some point you will come back to Part I to better understand the theory of co-creation and its use.

HOW CAN I KNOW WHAT
I THINK UNLESS I SEE
WHAT I SAY?



Karl Weick

PART I

SETTING

Are people around you talking about co-creation? Are people within your organization looking for ways to put it into practice? If so, that is no surprise. Co-creation is trending as many organizations are looking for ways to encourage their co-workers to become enthusiastic and committed. Despite the positive buzz about co-creation, we often hear that it can be quite challenging to apply co-creation effectively.

In this book we offer a number of specific and practical tools that will enable readers to use co-creation to deal with complex issues in an effective manner within organizations and networks. By describing our experiences implementing co-creation in various organizations we provide an insight into the underlying principles of co-creation and the conditions that enhance its use. We offer a wealth of specific tips and we describe common stumbling blocks encountered when applying co-creation and how to avoid them. Finally, we address myths associated with co-creation and their sense or nonsense.

Before we delve more deeply into the practice of co-creation here is an overview of the topics we will cover in each section of Part I:

What is co-creation? defines co-creation.

What can you gain from co-creation? gives you a snapshot of what co-creation can achieve for your organization. The more you read, the clearer that snapshot will become.

Co-creation, why now? examines the arguments for giving co-creation a more prominent place in society.

Three conceptual frameworks that are part of co-creation explores the philosophical foundations of co-creation.

Co-creation, an alternative to a top-down approach compares two approaches to implement and manage change.

What are the implications of co-creation for leaders? examines the impact of co-creation on the role of managers.

What is co-creation?

WE ASKED A NUMBER OF MANAGERS WHAT CO-CREATION MEANS TO THEM:

Tackling complex problems, including chaos and uncertainty, with more external than internal stakeholders.

Peter Van Oevelen, ex-Director, TriFinance

Letting people work together based on their strengths and allowing diversity to encourage creativity.

Jan Boeynaems, Manager Department of Public Health, Institute of Tropical Medicine

To innovate, together with external partners and within the contours of your own company culture. Innovation is imperative for a company's survival.

Phil Daenen, Architect Intern Beleid (Internal Policies), Levanto

A specific result achieved by cooperation within pre-agreed boundaries.

Martine Brisse, Chief People Development Officer, BASE Company

Developing a long-term vision, together with the whole system.

Luc van Gorp, Chairman Christelijke Mutualiteit

We regard co-creation as a form of collaboration on a collective task in which all participants, individuals, groups or organizations (stakeholders), each with their own interests and biases, influence the process and its result. Co-creation is particularly useful to overcome complex challenges for which a solution can only be found through the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders. Because all stakeholders are involved from the start of the process, the results reflect each participant's perspectives and as such are more likely to be implemented. The co-creation process is highly self-managed, but the design and setting of the process may require the direction of an experienced facilitator.

A variation of co-creation is the so-called Large Scale type, based on the Large Scale Interventions described by experts in the field such as Weisbord and Janoff (2010) and Bunker and Alban (1997). Large Scale processes do not necessarily involve large groups but rather they involve issues requiring Large Scale perspectives, meaning the broadest possible range of stakeholders views (the "whole system") need to be considered to solve a complex problem, or to execute a major change. Later we address themes such as organizational change and development and we show how co-creation can contribute to creating solutions, including solutions for problems with high social relevance.

Our definition of co-creation incorporates the whole system approach. The inclusion of all stakeholders from as early on in the process as possible has proven in our practice to be the best predictor of success.

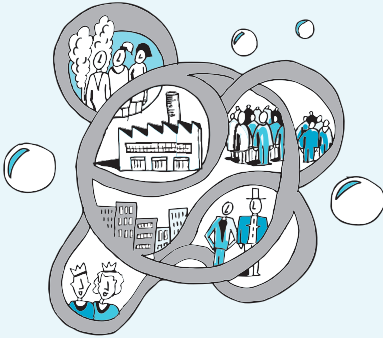
Weisbord and Janoff (2007) offer six principles that in practice profoundly support the successful application of co-creation theory:

1. Get the whole system in the room.
2. Explore the whole elephant before fixing any parts.
3. Control what you can, let go of what you cannot control.
4. Let people be responsible.
5. Search for common ground to base actions upon.
6. Use differences of opinion to allow new and fresh ideas.

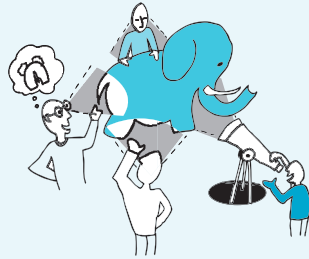
These principles are the fundamental building blocks of co-creation and reflect our understanding of what co-creation is. The overriding importance of these principles will become more apparent as you progress through this book.

PRINCIPLE 1

GET THE WHOLE SYSTEM IN THE ROOM.

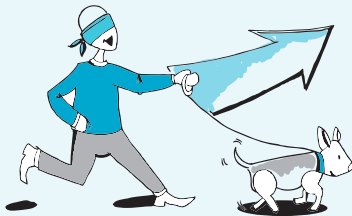


EXPLORE THE WHOLE ELEPHANT BEFORE
FIXING ANY PARTS.



PRINCIPLE 3

CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN,
LET GO OF WHAT YOU CANNOT CONTROL.



PRINCIPLE 4

LET PEOPLE BE RESPONSIBLE.



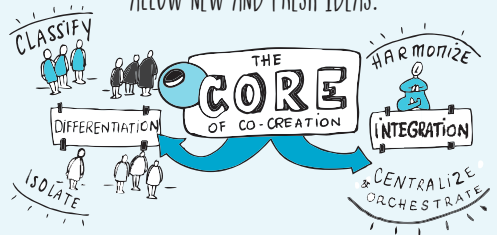
PRINCIPLE 5

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND TO BASE ACTIONS UPON.



PRINCIPLE 6

USE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION TO
ALLOW NEW AND FRESH IDEAS.



What can you gain from co-creation?

You will discover that co-creation is all about applying the six principles presented above. If you apply the basic principles to a “good enough” level, you will improve your chances of success. What is a good enough level? As you read through this book and begin to apply the principles in your organization you will discover what a good enough level is to achieve your goals.

Research by van der Zouwen (2011) shows that the results of co-creation fall into two basic groups.

Short term: more and better work

1. Better decisions and actions.
2. Commitment and energy for implementation.
3. New relationships that increase the potential for innovation and learning.
4. More trust.

Long term: sustainable development

1. An increased ability to change through increased awareness.
2. Boundaries between parts and functions in the system become more permeable.
3. An increased ability to anticipate future developments and to see more possibilities.

Co-creation, why now?

Historically, technological developments have created unprecedented prosperity. Today's managers are under ever increasing pressure to at least equal the achievements of previous decades. This has led to a number of social consequences.

Scharmer (2013) described this phenomenon using the metaphor of the iceberg, writing: "We can only see the tips of the icebergs: those are the main issues of our time including the ecological divide, the finite nature of resources, the social divide, increasing inequities, the spiritual divide, large groups of people searching for meaning in their lives."

On the other hand, prosperity has enabled better education and training. Large numbers of employees are now characterised as "knowledge workers" who have many options in the job market. The workforce is beginning to look more critically at companies. People are wondering about their roles within organizations. They want their work, the activity that takes up most of their time, to be meaningful. Furthermore most people, especially in the West, are no longer prepared to selflessly devote themselves to an organization only to suffer consequences to their health and well-being.

Authors from academic, economic and social circles describe these fields of tension, all from their own expertise background. A list of interesting publications on this subject is included at the end of this book. Scharmer describes this tension as bubbles that form under the surface of water when we do not act accordingly to what we say we want. As such, as a collective we produce results nobody wants. For instance, in the bubble of the financial markets, we stimulate banks and nations to make a lot of money in a risky manner. This continues until the bubble bursts into a financial crisis. Other crises that were created

in a similar way are global warming, pollution, uncontrollable migration, and persistent human rights violations, amongst others. By denying that the bubbles exist we sustain the existence of an artificial world. At some point these bubbles will come to the surface and burst.

The bubbles can be traced back to a single point of conflict: ego-system (egocentric) leadership that employs resources for individual aims and ignores the needs of what could be described as the ecosystem in which we all live. Scharmer and Kaufer (2013, in van der Zouwen, 2015) argue that if we want to tackle the bubbles, we need to work on increasing awareness of the whole eco-system and on shifting our thinking from “me” to “we”. They describe four stages in the development of awareness. In the next section we elaborate on these stages in the context of several sectors.