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|Harnessing the Wave of Co-Creation

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C o-creation has developed into a buzz-word for corporate and organizational management over the past decade. Essentially, co-creation is interpreted as the process of close involvement of end-users (clients, customers) in the development of services and products, a process that includes the consumer as a vital part of the development process. A far cry from entrenched Fordism, Bernaysism, and Taylorism approaches to marketing and development, co-creation affords both choice and voice to clients and stakeholders. The informed client is valued, and adds value to the design process – whether it is for the design of a definitive product, service, course, or process.

Co-creation did not evolve directly from the commercial sector – it just gained a visible momentum there. Open source software development movements which have ultimately led to rich social media applications, mirrored the co-creation process much earlier and continue to develop diverse tools that people from all walks of life can use to co-create digital content in a variety of forms.

James Cherkoff & Johnnie Moore (2006) wrote that "co-creation is an energetic process, not an intellectual exercise" (p.3). Sanders and Stappers (2008) defined co-creation as "any act of collective creativity" (p. 6). The authors go further to say, "To embrace co-creativity requires that one believes that all people are creative" and that "the predominant culture accepts egalitarian idea
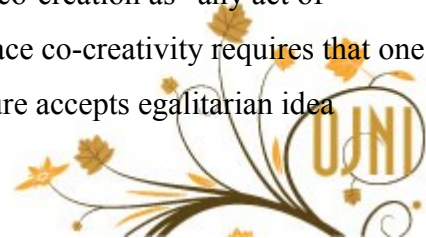
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sharing" (p. 9).

The principles of co-creation are evident in vital communities of practice, social groups, and expert teams where people come together to collaboratively create and share information, knowledge, and content beyond market exchange. The application of co-creation in eHealth and education via the medium of new media is beginning to evolve, but has not reached the level of fervour experienced in open source IT or business circles.

Pater (2009) described four types of co-creation configurations, primarily found in the business and open source sectors as well as communities of practice. These configurations include:

a)   a **Club of Experts** style of co-creation, best suited "for very specific time-pressured challenges that demand expertise and breakthrough ideas" (p. 2).

b)   a **Crowd of People** or "Crowd-sourcing" style that "unleashes the power of the masses… using online platforms, people can rate and respond to each other's suggestions and ideas" (p.2).

c)   a **Coalition of Parties** occurs when a people from various organizations "team up to share ideas and investments" (p.2), such as when companies decide to co-brand a product or service.

d)   a **Community of Kindred Spirits** refers to "groups of people with similar interests and goals come together and create something for the greater good. This model – so far – works mostly in software development and leverages the potential force of a large group of people with complementary areas of expertise" (p.2).

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P ater (2009) went further to define two central dimensions to the four types of co-creation: the dimensions are open-ness (who can join?) and ownership (who owns/controls the outcome?). Figure 1 illustrates the types and dimensions of Co-creation that Pater outlined.
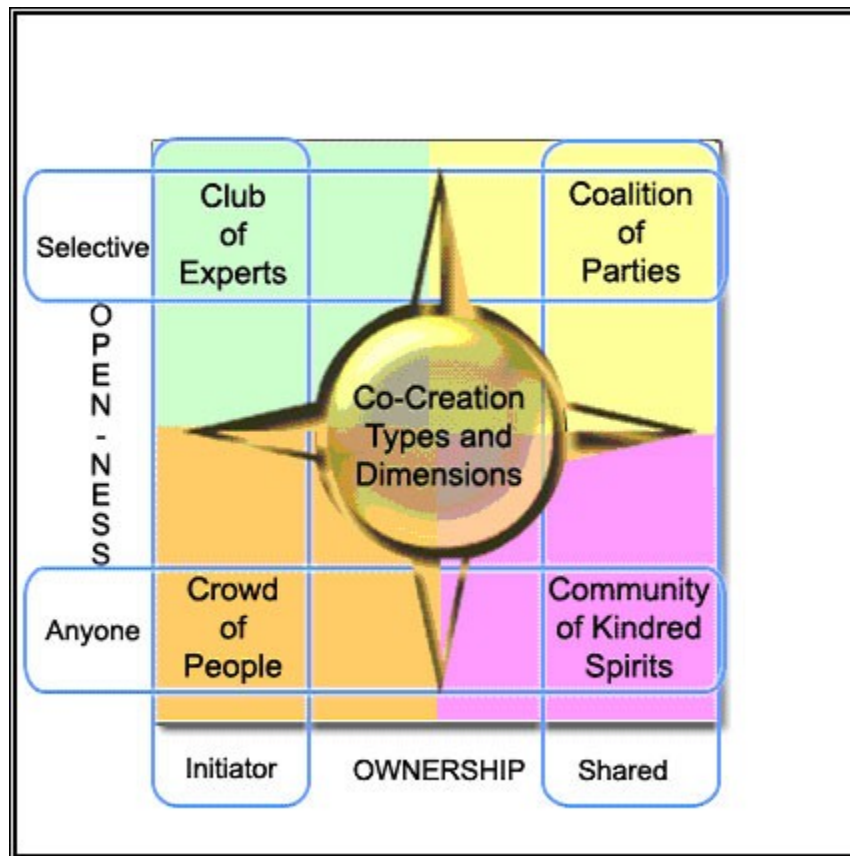

Figure 1 Co-creation Types and Dimensions (adapted from Pater, 2009, p.2).

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According to Pater (2009, p. 3) there are five guiding principles to initiating and maintaining co-creation. These self-explanatory principles include the following.

- Inspire Participation
- Select the very Best ideas and people
- Connect Creative Minds
- Share Results
- Continue Development

Co-Creation Foundations

The key building blocks of co-creation for business have been identified as dialogue, access, risk assessment, and transparency. (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). These key foundational tenets of co-creation can be modified from this existing business – focused model to fit more appropriately into the Ehealth, health care, and educational milieu by including the following characteristics

- Dialogue
- Access
- Transparency
- Planning
- Assessment

Dialogue – facilitates knowledge sharing and a shared level of understanding between those involved: in ehealth or education, between educator and learner, client and health professional, client to client, and learner to learner.

Access – learners need reliable and easy access to course resources and tools, as well as to the information technologies required such as computers, internet, and so on to engage in activist and

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advocacy initiatives. Likewise, clients need access to eHealth information and would benefit from co-co-creation opportunities.

Transparency – Clients need reassurance that their input and ideas will be considered equitably and considered when mateirals and systems are being planned and designed. Learners also need to feel confident in the course assignment guidelines and grading system in order to comfortably engage in the creation of course content. They need to develop a sense of trust that it is permissible to explore and safely engage in the preparation of public documents and resources.

Planning – the entire process of co-creation demands that clients and learners engage in a major part of the content planning with guidance from the health care professional or educator.

Assessment – This is a critical step in all co-creation activities to ensure that client or student input is being encouraged and utilized appropriately. In education, ultimately, the learner will need to be assessed. Engaging in creative content co-creation may present confusion on the part of the learner about how their work will be graded and what criteria will be used for assessment. As with the work itself, the assessment should also be done in a cooperative, co-created manner.

Tapping the Power of Web 2.0

There are many ways that health care professionals can engage eHealth clients, students or web site visitors in a way that builds both value and loyalty. All social media methods used in Web 2.0 activities are very applicable to the co-creation process. Blogs, wikis, folksonomies, as well as other methods including feedback forms, surveys, polls, and dialogue forums can be used to invite clients, students and visitors to 'have a say' in what is developed and offered. This applies to both services and products.
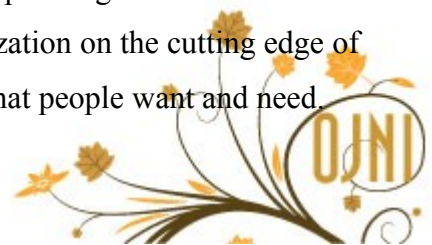
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Principles of Co-Creation

There are some simple yet fundamental principles to incorporate in order to truly engage your site visitors, clients or students in the co-creation process.

These include the following:

- Value and acknowledge their input

- Provide easy, accessible means to communicate - make sure they know where to respond without glitches

- Clearly explain what you need from them - make it easy for them to answer your questions or give input on an idea

- Allow all clients to give input - you never know where the next great idea is going to come from!

- Prove that you are listening - keep them up to date on how their input is being applied

- Make the process enjoyable and meaningful!

- Acknowledge their input publicly - let others know what a help they've been!

- Keep them engaged - someone needs to keep on top of the responses, and respond to them, both privately and publicly.

Adding Web 2.0 capabilities can help you to become a co-creation leader, and attract far more eHealth clients, visitors and customers than you enjoy now. By incorporating the choice and voice of your clients, students or site visitors, you can put your site or organization on the cutting edge of interactivity and popularity, plus make sure that what you offer is what people want and need.

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Related Links:
Co-Creation Rules
ReDesignMe Co-Creation Communities
The Co-Creation Connection