COLLABORATION & DESIGN THINKING: A TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO REDEFINING THE NEXT NORMAL AND CREATING RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS

Montressa L. Washington, Shenandoah University, Winchester, VA, U.S.A.
Jennifer R. Madden, Carthage College, Kenosha, WI, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

Collaboration is recognized as a viable strategy for addressing uncertain, complex, and wicked social problems. Design thinking has emerged as the premier organizational path to innovation and high-performance collaboration. Design thinking is useful in tackling complex problems that are ill-defined or unknown and by reframing the problem in human-centric ways this hands-on approach to problem solving makes way for innovative solutions. There are similarities between designers and collaborators, we conjecture that adopting design strategies is an important foundation for assembling successful collaborations tasked with solving problems quickly arising in this unprecedented time of disruption and monumental change. These collaborations of transdisciplinary teams cross many disciplinary boundaries to create a holistic approach using the power of design thinking coupled with robust collaborative technology to design bold, inclusive, and sustainable solutions. In addition, these collaborations are supported by digital technologies that enable capturing, analyzing and sharing data that is transparent and transformational. We propose a conceptual model of the moderating effect of design thinking on the collaboration variables (leadership, power, experience) affecting successful collaboration design and redesign contributing to the creation of resilient ecosystems

Keywords: *Designing collaborations, design, design thinking, cross-sector collaboration, transdisciplinary teams, public-private partnerships, power, leadership, experience.*

1. INTRODUCTION

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." – Albert Einstein

The worldwide spread of the contagious respiratory illness caused by a new coronavirus has resulted in unprecedented disruption of work and life (Zhang, Wang, Rauch, & Wei, 2020). The impact has been across sectors, from schools (Burgess, & Sievertsen, 2020) to small businesses (Bartik, Bertrand, Cullen, Glaeser, Luca, & Stanton, 2020) and ubiquitous, altering pre-COVID-19 ways of doing from socio-economics (Nicola, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Kerwan, Al-Jabir, Iosifidis, Agha, & Agha, 2020), to trade (Baldwin, & Tomiura, 2020), to daily life (Haleem, Javaid, & Vaishya, 2020). The systems-level impact has been comprehensive and world-changing suggesting a need for redefining the next-normal. This conceptual discourse examines how collaboration and design thinking, viewed as transdisciplinary approaches from management literature and practice when applied, may help individuals and organizations define a way forward and to become future-ready.

The medical community was among the first to determine that coordinated and collaborative efforts on an international level were needed to manage patient care during the COVID19 pandemic. Changes to resource allocation, clinical care, and the consent process during a pandemic were a few of the challenges surfaced. It was quickly determined the main management strategies for treating patients during the COVID-19 epidemic included clear communication and education about hand hygiene, infection control measures, high-risk exposure, and the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 (Al- Shamsi, et al, 2020). Improving collaborations between human welfare agencies, expanding community partnerships, and informing the public of important information is critical at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (Campbell, 2020) and represents a pathway to resilience.