Innovation to support leaving care transitions – Key components to implement and sustain innovation

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ASSISTING CARE LEAVERS. TIME FOR ACTION.

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EXploring Innovation in Transition (EXIT) Study

o Identifies ingredients to support 'innovation' for care leavers, from innovation conception through to scaling up

o Three phase approach to research design: (1) Systematic literature review; (2) 35 exploratory interviews with key senior practitioners & policymakers; (3) Deep dive into 5 case study organizations (3 local authorities & 2 voluntary sector/social enterprise providers, encompassing 7 tracer studies of of innovation)

o Employed care leavers as peer researchers alongside the postgraduate/postdoctoral researchers

o Interdisciplinary research team: business school, social care research unit, public health department

Key ingredients

Our case studies identified five key ingredients for innovation encompassing:

o Receptivity of organisational setting for innovation;

o Co-production with service users;

o Dynamics of leadership;

o Measurement of outcomes;

o Adaption and learning to sustain and scale up innovation

Receptivity of organisational setting

o Our study confirms the particular importance of the receptiveness of context, within which, not just limited resource, but organisational culture is a significant dimension.

o A 'burning platform' for innovation derived from the local authority being castigated for poor performance may engender paralysis, but may also mean stakeholders are receptive to innovation.

o Supportive culture for innovation needs to be in place, specifically around risk-taking

Co-Production with service users

o User co-production is important to assure end-user commitment to any innovation in service, for moral and democratic reasons, and to access experiential knowledge, to ensure innovation has a meaningful effect for care leavers.

o However, it was not always apparent in our cases: What emerged across our cases, appeared a binary choice at the inception of the innovation journey about whether user co-production was central to the innovation journey; a decision that then shaped the dynamics of innovation.

o Is co-production necessary for innovation? Depends upon context but absence does stymie sustaining innovation

Dynamics of Leadership

o Senior level leadership appears particularly important in the initiation and implementation of innovation, & contexts where performance is poor. However leadership needs to extend beyond senior management.

o Leadership may derive from hybrid middle managers in a more permissive context for innovation created by good performance in delivery of services for care leavers.

o Individual 'soul of fire' or professional champion drove innovation in many of our cases

o Leadership shared, rather than concentrated in an individual champion, appears advantageous, since it mediates the risk that when that individual departs, the impetus for innovation may depart with them.

o Shared leadership should also encompass elected members & clients/carers

Measurement of Outcomes

o Where innovation was funded by policy agencies (e.g. DfE), then higher level measurement may hide outcomes for more vulnerable care leavers

o Local authority cases were bound by 'business case' measurement to elicit sustained resourcing, but commonly had an unsophisticated approach to this

o Measures of psychological outcomes for care leavers may be marginalised

o Enjoying more freedom from regulatory strictures, social enterprise (SEHP) or voluntary sector providers (CLCP) appeared more able to place psychological outcomes for care leavers 'left, right and centre' during the innovation journey from implementation to its sustaining.

Adaption and learning

o There is a need for adaption of an innovation as it sustains, to ensure it is acceptable to frontline professionals on the basis it supports, rather than supplants existing mandatory services.

o Adaption of innovation may be informed by learning in real time, including failure that follows experimentation.

o Local authorities face considerable challenge in experimentation & failure in the face of constrained resource

Discussion

o Think about innovation as a journey: Some ingredients are important as innovation is Initiated, such as senior manager cultivation of a receptive context for innovation.

o Some ingredients are more important than others to sustain innovation; for example, leadership from political members, outcome measurement and adaption to mediate any resistance from frontline professionals.

o Ingredients to support innovation journey are organizationally contingent

o Meaningful innovation is desirable through experimentation, learning & adaption, but is challenging in public sector providers

o Professional champions are active agents for innovation, but may render it fragile (if they leave)

o Co-production of innovation with users not always present: binary choice at inception that then shaped innovation dynamics.