

CO-DESIGNING INNOVATION LABS FOR SERVICE ECOSYSTEM CHANGE.

The case of mental healthcare Co-Labs

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Purpose – There is a growing interest in the role played by Public Innovation Labs, research labs “set up to change both the mindset and the practices of identifying problems and of developing solutions within their agencies” (Junginger 2014, 65). Given the mixed signs of success and failures, studies have been looking into their characteristics (Schuurman e Tönurist 2016, McGann, Blomkamp e Lewis 2018), the role they play to transform innovation practices (Carstensen e Bason 2012, Kimbell 2015); and their potential to enhance co-creation, experimentation and learning (Thenint 2009), but little has been said on how they should be set up to achieve so. This paper aims to illustrate the initial stages of setting up an innovation lab, as a precondition for the transformation of complex service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch, 2011), such as in the case of mental healthcare.

Design/Methodology/approach – This paper will illustrate the first step of an action research project toward the establishment of 3 Recovery Co-Labs in the Lombardy region in Italy. The set-up of the labs has been planned in three main stages: a preliminary research, 4 co-design workshops, prototyping and specifications. The preliminary research consists in a literature review on innovation labs, an in-depth study of 3 key exemplars, and a collaborative mapping of local resources facilitated by a team of sociologists. The collected data then informed a common co-design workshop to elaborate on possible scenarios that were then declined into 3 dedicated workshops in each location; short experience prototypes were then conducted to experiment with activities and draw specifications for the design of spaces.

Findings – The role of service design (SD) is generally associated with how Innovation Labs operate for public service innovation, while this paper will illustrate and discuss how SD has been used to: 1) Engage, activate and test the roles of the core teams of the developing labs; 2) Familiarise and test SD as process against existing practices and working models; 3) Reveal and expose some of the existing values and assumptions across the multiple partners; 4) Experiment with and test ways to favour the emergence of opportunities for co-creation.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable) – The set-up of the 3 labs is the first step of a wider transformational project aiming to lead mental healthcare toward a community-based psychiatry. This paper will be able to discuss initial findings and a developing theoretical framework to be further tested as the project evolves.

Practical implications (if applicable) – This paper will provide an initial guide for public sector managers aiming to establish innovation units and build design capabilities in their organisations as a way to initiate system change.

Originality/value – Studies are exploring SD as a transformational practice (Sangiorgi et al. 2019) contributing to complex service system change (Sangiorgi, Patricio, & Fisk, 2017), but there is no research on how SD can forge innovation units to lead the transformation of service ecosystems.

Key words: mental healthcare, service design, innovation labs, service ecosystem change

Paper type – Research paper

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