

It's not me, it's you: policy interventions by/for people with disabilities

 Innovation image

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Organisation: Central Innovation Hub - Privy Council Office

Country: Canada

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services

Type: Communication, Data, Human Resources, Methods, Organisational Design, Partnerships, Public Service

Launched in: 2015

Overall development time: 10 month(s)

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Description

Despite legal protections, Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) still face a disproportionately higher rate of discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Given the number of laws, policies and programs for PWDs in the Government of Canada, the gap between experiences of PWDs and the general population lies in the areas of: a) ill-fitting solutions, misaligned with needs of the PWDs; or b) appropriate solutions that are poorly implemented. To improve the organizational culture for PWDs, the Department of Health (Government of Canada) in collaboration with the Central Innovation Hub of the Privy Council Office, initiated a Diverse Abilities project to identify and prototype initiatives to build a fully respectful and supportive workplace where all employees can fully apply their set of abilities for the best organization possible.

Why the innovation was developed

- A co-design project was developed to focus on the experiences of those who identify as PWDs, those who do not disclose their disabilities, and those with associated responsibilities within the system.
 - PWDs were asked to write a hypothetical "break-up" or "love" letter to the department indicating why they would leave or stay in their current position. This unstructured, personal letter exercise was chosen to overcome difficulties around soliciting participation on extremely uncomfortable topics such as harassment (which may fail traditional interview techniques). It avoids prematurely identifying needs and solutions, common in poorly designed surveys or questionnaires
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction, Support economic growth

Main beneficiaries

Academia, Civil Society, Elderly people, Families, Government bodies, Government staff, High-risk populations, People with disabilities, Students, Young people

Results

Results not available yet

- Ideas are still in development, however, participants are more likely to ideate across multiple stages rather than primarily in the "accommodate" stage. Participants are also more cognizant about how existing programs are not sufficiently designed for their population.
- For example, in response to PWDs feeling overqualified for their job, employers created career development programs for PWDs. These programs were not successful in improving the upward mobility because people were unwilling to self-disclose their disability status, seek help from an unknown managers, as well as (potentially) give up hard-fought, previously secured, accommodations. In addition, rather than emphasizing greater diversity training for managers (a perceived panacea), participants are embracing opportunities with under-emphasized stakeholders such as teammates; this was a previously unrecorded, nascent solution theme identified by all the PWDs with positive experiences (e.g. "love" letter writers).

Development

Design

Design Team of the Central Innovation Hub (Strategic Design Lead and Design Researchers). As a co-design initiative, PWD's were involved in all phases of the project. PWDs who submitted letters conducted a systems analysis on the letters using a pre-determined grid analysis tool that made explicit relationships between system actors, their roles, motivations, assumptions, responses, actions and (in hindsight) alternative actions and aspirational organizational principles. PWD's participated in the co-design brainstorming workshop. To date, three ideation workshops were held with PWDs and general employees (representing potential teammates of PWDs). Ideas are being collated, refined and PWDs will be asked to vote on their top ideas to prototype and implement in situ.

The contents of the letters were analyzed using three multidisciplinary methods: 1. PWDs who submitted letters conducted a systems analysis on the letters using a pre-determined grid analysis tool; 2. Design ethnographers developed journey maps to synthesize the temporal (and cyclical) experience of PWDs; 3. Qualitative data analysis was conducted to code text to specific journey stages, conduct a sentiment analysis, and generate word trees of dominant sentence structures. Using the stages of the journey map, an ideation exercise "inspired by serious games" was designed to create a structured co-design brainstorming workshop. Design time: 4 month(s)

Challenges and solutions

- PWDs often have complex interactions with public services, and these personal experiences can sometimes be very sensitive.
 - A "break-up" letter method was developed as a way to collect information about these experiences from PWDs rather than more traditional interview/focus group research methods.
 - A co-design approach that involved PWDs in the analysis of the contents of the letters has helped to generate culturally sensitive ideas that are designed with rather than for PWDs.
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Partnerships

Government of Canada - Department of Health

Other Public Sector

As a Co-Design Partnership, Department of Health acted as the Sponsoring Department and and The Innovation Hub as Project Lead.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- The break-up letter exercise and journey map synthesis allowed the PWD community to understand shared experiences across diverse abilities- rather than debate which sub-group should be given priority assistance. This emphasizes the importance of involving the key players at the beginning of the project and conducting ideation brainstorming sessions once in-depth research has been completed.
 - Health Canada have been a highly receptive partner in carrying out novel methods to tackle old problems. The partnership allowed both members to focus on the positive impact to PWDs and the organization overall.
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Conditions for success

- Expertise in novel methods of engagement (design methodologies, design thinking), emerging technology (data analytics, qualitative data analysis), User participation (qualitative research, co-creation), Receptive and open minded partnerships.
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Other information

Background and context for this project: Despite legal protections, PWDs still face a disproportionately higher rate of discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Within the Canadian public service, 2014 survey results show that PWDs expressed less positive opinions on staffing, and were victims of a higher discrimination rate (26% versus 7%) and harassment rate (65% vs 4%) compared to the general public service population. These longitudinal surveys indicate a consistent worsening trend over the decades.
