



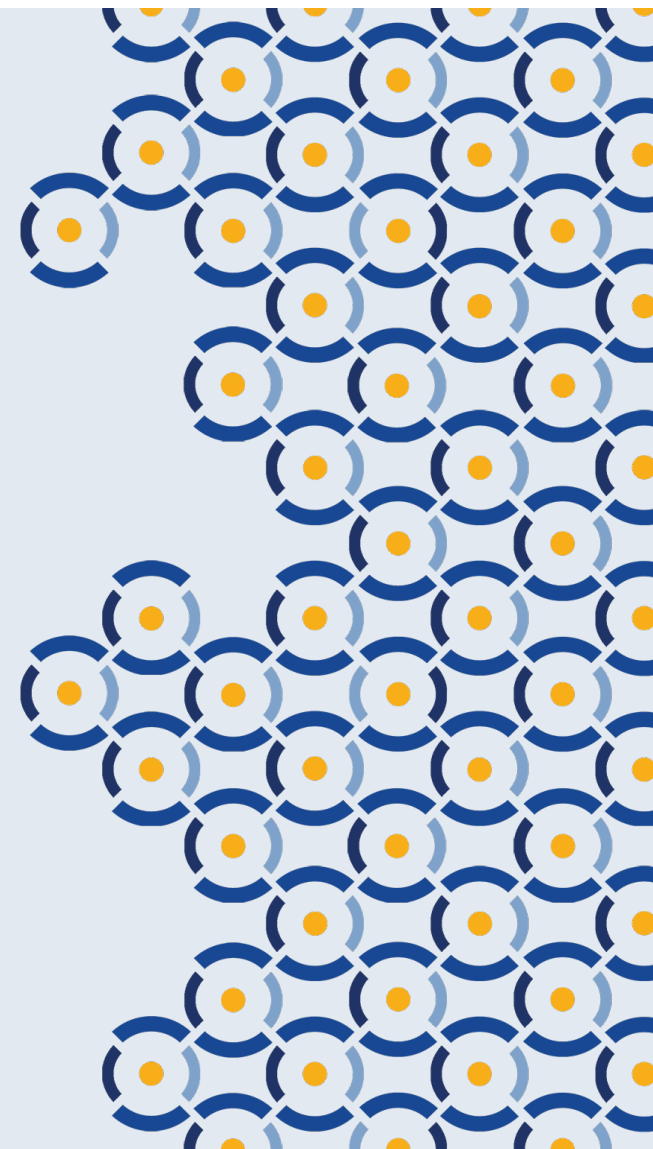
CO-CREATION PARTICIPATION GUIDE

GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR CO-CREATION EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

WHAT IS CO-CREATION AND WHY IT MATTERS

Co-creation is a collaborative approach to problem-solving and innovation where diverse stakeholders – such as clients, team members, and partners – work together to create value.

Unlike traditional top-down processes, co-creation emphasizes shared ownership, mutual learning, and active participation from everyone involved.

Co-creation differs from collaboration or participatory methods by involving all the relevant stakeholders in the actual development of solutions as a team. End-users (such as patients in healthcare) are the target of design and involved in validation of the solutions; they are not team members.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

As you are about to begin your (first) co-creation journey, this guide helps you align your expectations, provides concrete tools for teamwork, and highlights some of the best practices for working with your team.

The guide focuses on the team member's perspective. To get the most out of your co-creation journey, the guide supports an effective and proactive mindset toward teamwork.

At the end of the day, only results and learning matter!



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1. MINDSET & PRINCIPLES OF CO-CREATION
2. SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS
3. CO-CREATION PROCESS & TOOLS
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6. BEST PRACTICES & COMMON PITFALLS FOR CO-CREATION
7. OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES



There are also more in-depth tools developed for the most crucial steps in co-creation as part of the IMPAC3T project.



1. Mindset & principles of co-creation

How to approach co-creation?

What is expected of team members in co-creation?

What creates value in co-creation?



How to approach co-creation?

MINDSET

Curiosity

Ask questions, dig deeper, and explore before jumping to solutions.

Empathy

Your target users are the most important people. Try to step into their shoes in every situation.

Be open-minded

Expect your assumptions to be challenged – and challenge others' points of view

APPROACH

Ask and learn

Use your co-creators as mentors to learn about their expertise.

Prioritize listening

Don't just wait to speak but actively listen and try to understand the different points of view.

Cope with uncertainty

There are no quick wins in co-creation. Trust the process and your team members. The result will come.



What is expected of team members in co-creation?

In a co-creation team, no matter the setup, each co-creation team member is responsible for the results. This means each member is responsible for their own work and the overall performance of the team.

Usually, in co-creation teams, there are many different skillsets. This is why co-creation requires a high level of trust between the individuals. To get the most out of the teamwork, you have to trust your teammates to do their best. Instead of focusing too much on what others are doing, make sure you are contributing and feeding others with points of view and ideas.

Be open about success and failure. When the project starts, we don't know if we are going to succeed. Uncertainty is always present, so try to embrace it.

REFLECTION:

How do you see yourself as a co-creator?
What kind of habits do you need to learn?
What kind of risks do you see in your own behavior?



What creates value in co-creation?

The main reason why co-creation is used in innovation and development is to drive out the risk of useless results by collaborating with diverse competences and trying to ensure the meaningfulness of the results. We also know that when we increase diversity in a team or project, the average quality of ideas decreases while the quality of the best ideas increases significantly. This means in practice that the number of potential solution ideas and concepts needs to be high to find the most valuable ones.

The value in co-creation comes in many forms depending on the project goals and needs:

- **Diverse perspectives** – better understanding of the big picture
- **Unexpected solutions** – embrace the offshoots in the discussions and development
- **Stronger buy-in and alignment from stakeholders** – especially crucial for further development of the results (IP, patents, services, products, research, etc.)
- **Trust and transparency** – backbone for all co-creation



2. Setting up for success

What to consider before starting the co-creation process?

What kind of tools will help you?



What to consider before starting the co-creation process?



Check out the *Co-creation team competence assessment tool* for a more in-depth analysis of your team's strengths and weaknesses.

Before jumping into action, you can use the following canvas to make sure you have discussed and agreed on the most crucial elements in the co-creation process. The canvas is divided into two sections: **personal motivation and project-related aspects**. It is crucial to understand who the stakeholders are in the project and what their motivation is.

How to use the canvas?

- The canvas acts as inspiration for honest discussions about the project expectations, each team member's personal motivation and project-related aspects.
- If you are physically in the same place, you can print out the canvas and use sticky notes to write down the answers. This is highly recommended!
- If you cannot be physically in the same place, you can do this online, with one of the team members filling in the information in the canvas as you discuss.



Co-creation canvas for personal motivation

Every team member fills in their own answers.

Tell about yourself:

- What is your background?
- What do you enjoy to do?
- What do you do when you're not working?

Motivation towards the project:

- Why is this topic interesting to you?
- What kind of inspiring topics have you observed regarding the project? E.g., products, services, people, signals, trends, etc.

Your personal goals:

- What are your personal goals in the project?
- What would you like to learn?
- In what would you like to say you succeeded after the project ends?



Co-creation canvas for project-specific aspects

Answered as a team

Goals in the project:

- What is the project aiming to achieve?
- What is expected of us in the project?

Expertise team members bring:

- What kind of competences & know-how do you have as a team?
- Is there something clearly lacking?

Ways of working:

- How do you expect to work as a team?
- What are the concrete communication and teamwork tools and platforms?
- What is the project timeline?

Potential value for different stakeholders:

- What are the individuals/organizations looking to get out of the project?

Roles and responsibilities:

- What kind of roles can already be seen in the project?
- Who is responsible for what?

Risks and restrictions:

- What kind of risks do you already foresee that could occur during the project?
- What might restrict you from succeeding in the project?



Agreement framework and further development



Check out the *Co-creation agreement models and frameworks* for guidelines to draft the appropriate agreements for your project.

Although we are about to start co-creation, it's good to stop and think about the time after the project. Here's a short checklist to make sure everyone understands the practical goals for further development and the agreement model used.



Who owns the results or can utilize the results after the project?



What kind of background material do you have at your disposal for the project? How can it be utilized?



What are the best-case scenarios for further development? Academic research, startup business, R&D project, publications, etc.



Do you have a budget or external resources at your disposal? How can you make the most out of these?



3. Basic co-creation process tools

What does a co-creation process look like?

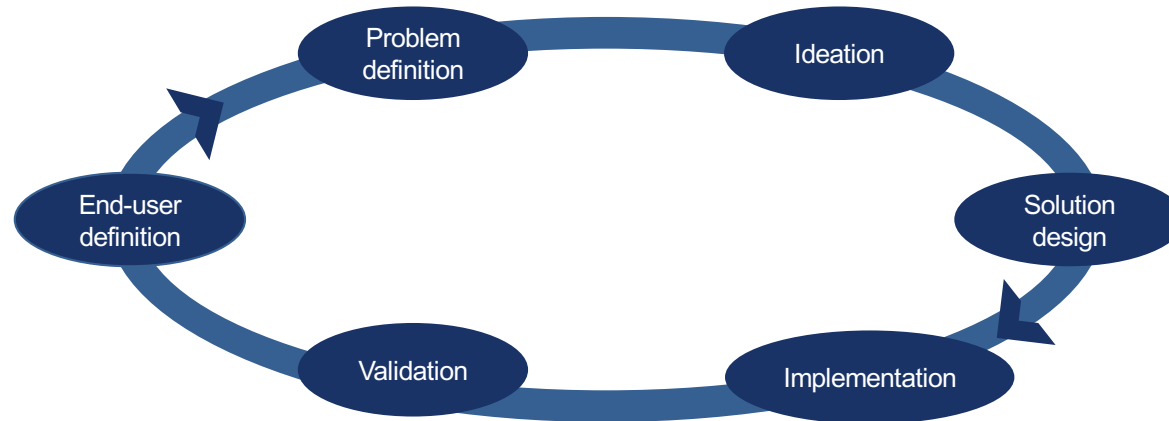
What tools can you use in different phases of the process?

How to get the most out of your co-creation process?

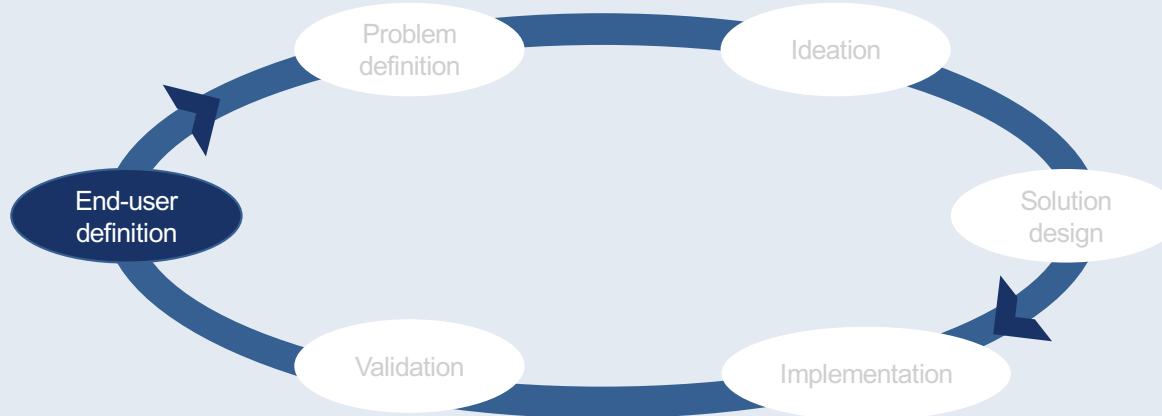


How does a co-creation process look like?

There are infinite ways you can form the process for your co-creation journey. Here are the basic elements for a modern, dynamic, and iterative co-creation process. The process focuses heavily on the end-users, problem definition, and solution design. Business design is left outside the scope, as it is usually done after the co-creation process during further development.



End-user definition



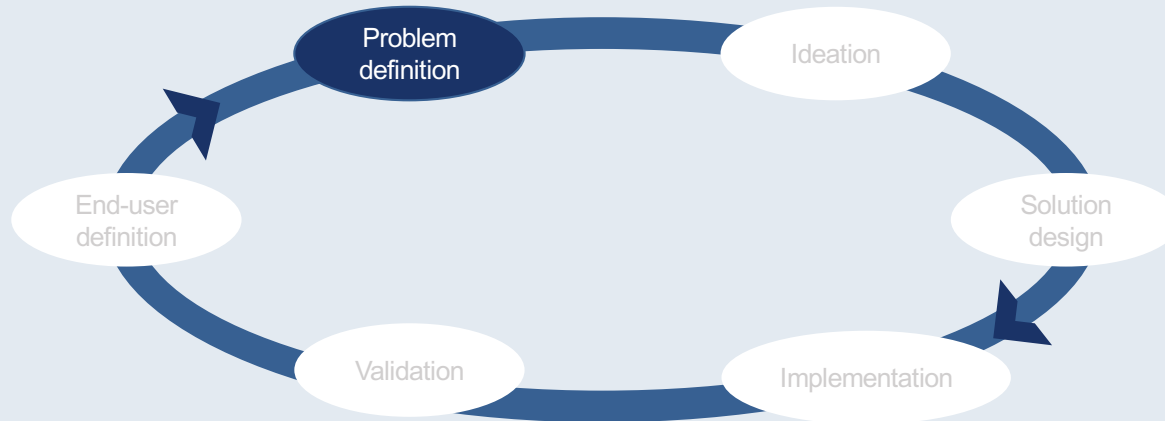
Understanding exactly who the "end-user" is forms the bedrock of any successful co-creation project. Without a clear picture of the individuals who will ultimately use the product, service, or solution being developed, the entire collaborative effort risks missing the mark. Co-creation demands bringing diverse perspectives together, but if those perspectives aren't based on a deep understanding of the target audience's needs, desires, pain points, and contexts, the results might be irrelevant or impractical.

Defining the end-user ensures that all co-creation activities – from brainstorming sessions to prototyping and testing – are focused on solving real problems for real people, leading to more meaningful and impactful outcomes.

TOOLS

- Persona template
- Megatrends
- Point of view template
- Empathy map

Problem definition

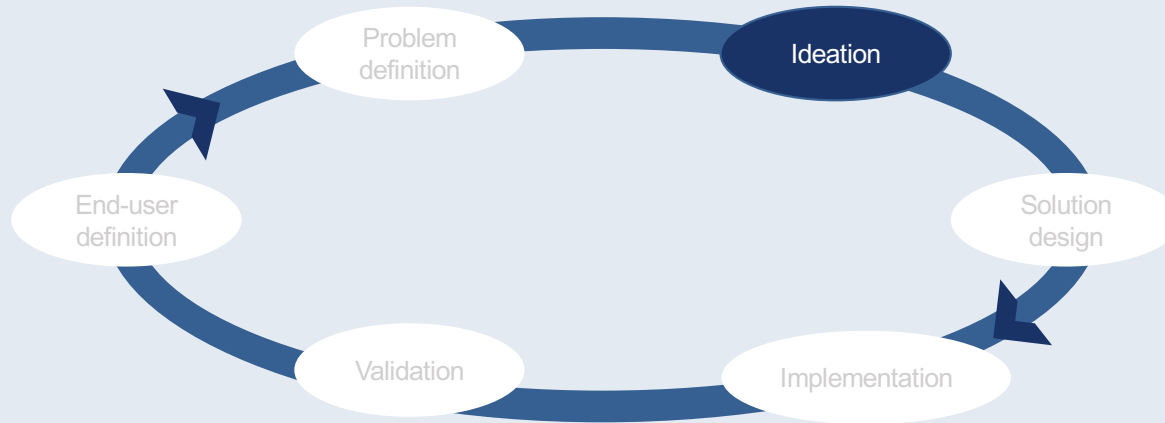


Before you start building anything, you need to know exactly what you're trying to fix or improve. A well-defined problem statement acts as the central point around which all co-creation efforts revolve. It provides clarity and focus for everyone involved, from the project team to the end-users and other stakeholders.

There are far too many solutions looking for problems in the world, so don't make the same mistake – spend proper time and focus on the end-user problems.

TOOLS

- Problem statement template
- Problem tree
- Point of view template



Ideation

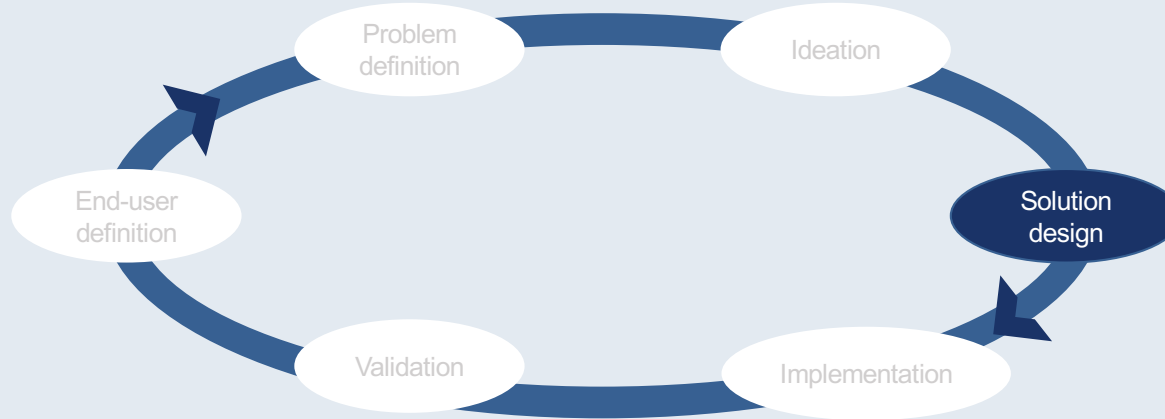
Once you have a clear understanding of the end-user and a well-defined problem, the next crucial step is to actively generate a diverse range of potential solutions. Ideation is the engine that drives innovation: it's the process of exploring possibilities, thinking outside the box, and coming up with creative ways to tackle the identified problem.

In a co-creation setting, bringing together different perspectives during ideation can spark truly novel and unexpected solutions that a single individual or team might not have conceived on their own.

TOOLS

- PLEX cards
- 6-3-5 brainwriting
- Stepladder brainstorming
- Storytelling

Solution design



After you've generated a promising set of ideas to tackle the problem, the solution design phase is where those abstract concepts start to take a concrete form. It's the process of translating the chosen ideas into tangible blueprints, outlining the specific features, functionalities, interactions, and overall experience of the proposed solution.

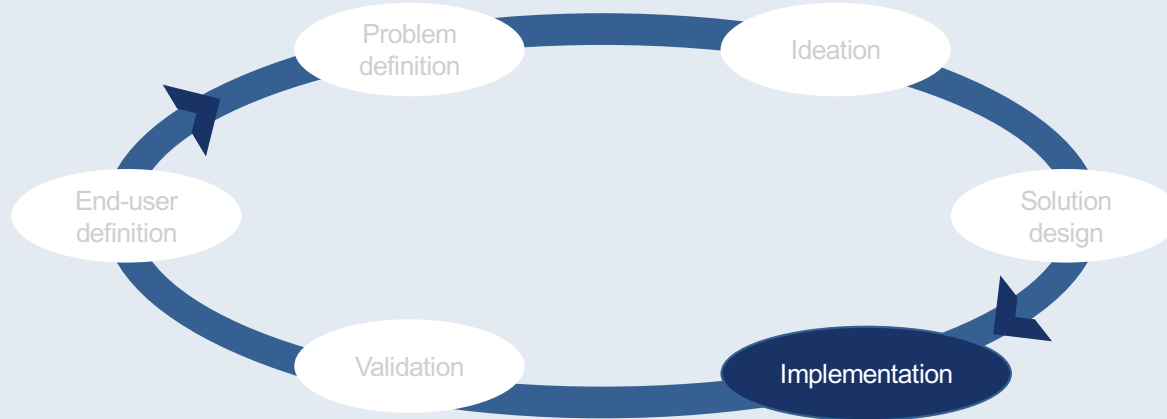
In a co-creation context, this stage benefits immensely from the continued collaboration of various stakeholders, ensuring that the design not only addresses the problem effectively but also aligns with the end-user's needs and preferences.

TOOLS

- Features-functions-values mapping
- Concepting
- Rapid prototyping



Implementation



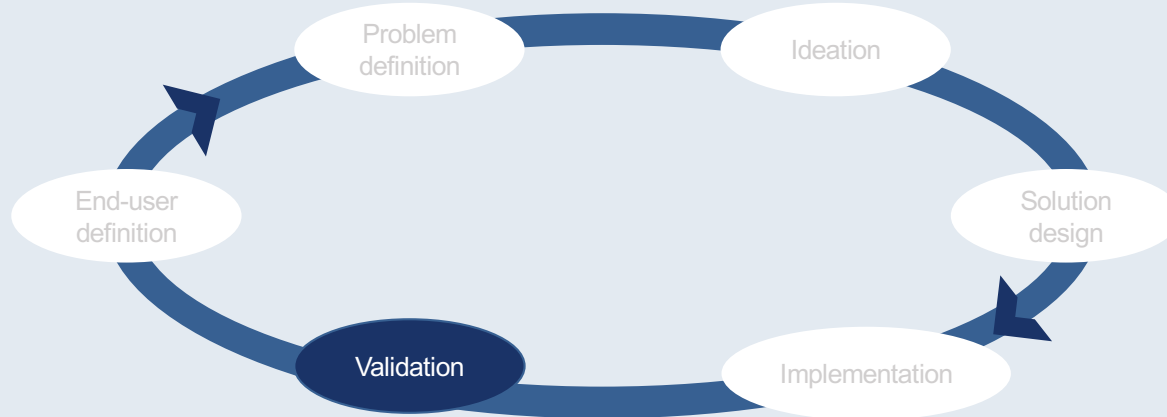
Co-creation isn't just about generating ideas; it's about bringing them to life. Implementation is where all the insights, input, and energy from co-creation turn into real-world impact. Without follow-through, even the best ideas risk becoming "workshop souvenirs."

It's also how you honor the contributions of the people who helped shape the solution. When ideas are implemented, participants can see their voices – and that builds lasting trust and momentum.

In the early phases of your co-creation project, don't hesitate to use AI tools, but remember: AI is a great servant, but a terrible master. Don't let AI design the solutions for you, but use it to take your implementation forward faster.

(AI) TOOLS

- Lovable
- ChatGPT
- Gamma.app
- Openart.ai



Validation

Validation ensures that what you're creating is actually working for the people it's meant to help. In co-creation, you involve users and stakeholders throughout the process, but validation is your reality check.

It's how you test assumptions, spot gaps, and confirm that the solution meets real needs – not just your team's ideas of what's needed. Validation turns feedback into progress. It helps you refine, improve, and reduce risk before scaling or launching.

Without validation, co-creation is just wishful thinking. With it, you build confidence that you're on the right track.

VALUE PROPOSITION TOOLS

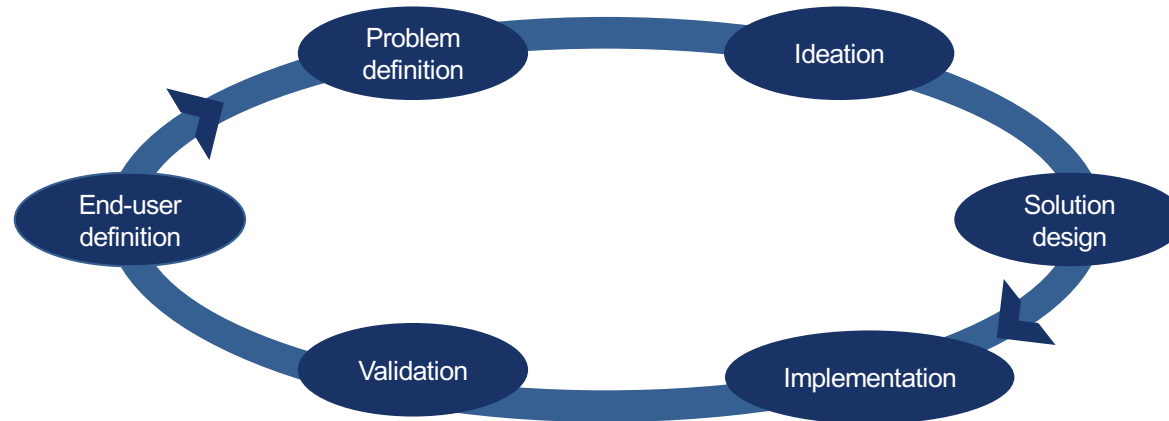
- NABC
- Golden Circle
- User testing
- Interviews



How to get the most out of your co-creation process?

Often in co-creation, the most limiting factor is the time spent together with your team to take the project forward. From the process point of view, you should always be trying to maximize the number of iterations. This will improve the quality of the results, step by step. Start small and grow with each iteration.

NOTE: Follow the order in the process! It is very tempting to start skipping steps, but every time you skip a step, you risk the problem-solution fit or the continuous feedback loop with your end-users.





4. Collaboration & teamwork

How to approach collaboration and teamwork in co-creation?
What collaboration tools can help you get started?



How to approach collaboration & teamwork in co-creation?

1. Align the team on purpose: Make sure everyone understands the “why” behind the project. Revisit shared goals regularly to stay on track.
2. Know your role (and respect others’ roles): Be clear about your responsibilities and contributions. Trust teammates to bring their strengths.
3. Work transparently: Share progress, challenges, and decisions openly.
4. Collaborate, don’t compete: Prioritize collective success over individual credit.
5. Reflect together: Schedule regular check-ins and retrospectives. Ask questions like “What’s working? What can we improve? Do we agree on the feedback analysis?”

Collaboration tools to get you started 1/2

There are hundreds of great tools for your co-creation journey. Choose the ones that are the most natural for your co-creation team to use. Here are some proven tools that work very well for co-creation:

Communication & collaboration

Tool	Purpose	Benefits
Slack	Quick team communication, channels for topics	Keeps conversation flowing and visible to everyone
Microsoft Teams	Messaging, meetings, file sharing	Great for orgs already on Microsoft 365
Zoom/Google Meet	Video meetings, breakout rooms	Smooth for remote workshops and check-ins

Organizing work & information

Notion	Central knowledge base, task tracking, documentation	Combines docs, project management, and transparency
Trello/Asana	Task management, project progress	Keeps everyone aligned on who's doing what and when
Miro/FigJam	Visual collaboration, workshop boards	Great for co-design sessions, mapping, ideation



Collaboration tools to get you started 2/2

Feedback &
Validation

Tool	Purpose	Benefits
Typeform/Google Forms	Surveys and structured feedback	Easy way to gather input from users and stakeholders
Maze/Useberry	User testing for prototypes	Validates early ideas with real data and feedback

Tools to increase transparency

- **Shared calendars** (e.g., Google Calendar): Keep everyone aware of the key dates and sessions
- **Team dashboards** (in Notion, Trello, etc.): Show current work, blockers, and progress
- **Open meeting notes/recordings**: Let absent teammates catch up easily



Check out the *Co-creation continuation mapping* and the *Co-creation results analysis* tools to support the next steps.

5. Wrapping up the co-creation project

How to identify the created opportunities?

How to plan the further development of the co-creation results?



How to identify the created opportunities?

Here's a simple canvas to help you go through the discussions with your team to write down the created opportunities:

LEARNINGS

- What are the core problems solved in this project?
- What are the key insights recognized in the project?

CREATED OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity statements:

- "We observed _____ which suggests an opportunity for _____."
- "We observed _____ which suggests an opportunity for _____."
- "We observed _____ which suggests an opportunity for _____."

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

- What kind of validation did you get during the project?
- What kind of development ideas did you collect?
- What kind of feedback did you get during the project?

CONCEPTS & PROTOTYPES

- What kind of concepts did you create?
- Which of the concepts did you take to the prototyping level?
- How did you test the concepts/prototypes?



How to plan the further development of the co-creation results?

POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PATHS

- Startup project: What would be the core offering, team needs, and initial steps?
- Internal R&D: How can we integrate this into existing products/services or explore it further internally?
- Research project: What key research questions need to be answered? Potential partners?
- Others (specify):

INITIAL ACTION STEPS & OWNERSHIP

- For each potential development path, what are the 1–3 concrete action steps we'd need to take first?
- Who will take ownership?
- Who benefits the most from further development?

RESOURCE & SUPPORT NEEDS

- What resources (e.g., funding, expertise, technology, partnerships) would be required for each path?
- What support do we need?

NEXT STEPS & TIMELINE

- What are the immediate next steps following this discussion?
- Is everyone clear about each other's plans and goals?
- What's a realistic timeline for initial exploration or action?



6. Best practices and common pitfalls in co-creation



Best practices in co-creation

- **Overcommunicate** – Every time you ponder “Should I let others know about this...?”, the answer is yes – communicate it. This not only makes the team’s work more transparent, but it also encourages others to communicate.
- **Report online, work offline** – Avoid having reporting meetings where you get together with your team and start going through what everyone has done, set new tasks, and leave. This is time away from effective co-creation work with your team. Instead, every time you meet face to face, try to develop the project further with your team as soon as possible.
- **Value and recognize contributions** – In the middle of a development project, it is easy to forget to recognize valuable inputs from the team members or stakeholders. Try to demonstrate how team members’ ideas and feedback have influenced the outcomes. Focus on the results, not the effort.



Common pitfalls in co-creation

- **Micro-managing other team members** – Different competences in a team mean that trying to manage others' work is extremely artificial. Avoid micro-managing your teammates' work and focus on your own expertise.
- **Hiding mistakes and break-through ideas** – Because we are human, we crave acceptance. Too often, this leads to hiding the mistakes you've made. On the other hand, you might feel tempted to hide your best ideas or concepts from others because "maybe I will just do this by myself or save it for my own organization". Both of these lead to slow communication, lack of transparency, and – in the worst-case scenario – legal issues.
- **Panicking with uncertainty and forcing creativity** – After a few weeks, all early-phase development teams face the issue of uncertainty. It feels like the problems keep getting bigger, you keep wandering on weird side paths in the development, and no one seems to be able to give you the answers. Don't worry, this is normal. Not embracing this uncertainty kills many promising projects, and the worst thing you can do is force creativity within the team and create artificial deadlines for "killer ideas". Stick to the process and trust that the interesting opportunities will reveal themselves.



6. Other helpful resources



Market Opportunity Evaluation Tool

If your co-creation results show clear business potential, you can use this two-fold tool to evaluate the market opportunity. This is especially helpful if you are setting up a startup to further develop the results. The tool includes questions that future customers and potential investors are most likely interested in as well.



Co-creation Competence Assessment Tool

In order to get the most out of your co-creation experience on a personal level, we highly recommend using the *Co-creation competence assessment tool* to have a simple 360-degree evaluation of your co-creation skills. This evaluation can be used for personal reflection: Do your own thoughts and expectations match reality? What should you pay more attention to? What are your strengths and weaknesses?