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Using an Accelerated Experience Based Co-Design approach (AEBCD) to design inclusive services

Accelerated Experience-Based Co-Design (AEBCD) – brings together people who provide and draw on support to identify shared priorities for improvement and work up practical solutions.

Work is divided into two stages: Discovery and Co-design. A themed video resource is created from video and audio clips from people's stories to compile a short film (around twenty minutes in length) representing people's experiences of a particular service or issue. This will usually capture positive and negative experiences and important 'touch points' in related support; Known in AEBCD as a 'catalyst film', its use is a distinctive component of the approach.

In the second stage, Co-Design, employs the catalyst film in a series of workshops to prompt discussion around improvement priorities and helps build a coalition of intent between staff and people with lived experience of the services or issues. These discussions are then used in practical co-design work to improve or develop services.

Using the AEBCD model for researching and designing services in local authorities provides a powerful way to address social issues in research through inclusive, experience-based co-design. The following highlight some important tips for using the model, by following these tips, we can ensure that our use of the AEBCD model is impactful, sustainable, and truly reflective of community needs.

An example from social care services to tackle loneliness.

This model has been used frequently to develop services in health but was recently tested by Doncaster Council who led a local AEBCD project, partnered by Doncaster's Social Isolation and Loneliness Alliance, to co-design improvements in loneliness support.

Loneliness affects many individuals and has significant social and health impacts, making it a priority for the UK government and local authorities, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic.

By using the Accelerated Experience-Based Co-Design (AEBCD) model, services worked directly with individuals who experience loneliness, to hear their views and include them. The film, along with more detail from the interviews is freely available. Other material includes topic summaries, for example, feeling different, home and culture, and social media and loneliness. 'These resources may help people feel less alone and can also be used in courses and training for social workers and others who support people experiencing loneliness.

This example of the AEBCD model being used to understand loneliness, including the catalyst film can be found here:

https://socialcaretalk.org/introduction/loneliness

The strengths of using AEBCD within social care means it is possible to identify values belonging to individuals working and encountering services. Members of the co design group reported feeling listened to. Group members spoke about how they would take learning from the project to other settings, and how they felt determined to continue with this work.

The AEBCD Model as a Tool for Inclusivity and Impact

It is important to Identify people or organisations who potentially could have responsibility for implementing improvements, including finding relevant funding, but when used thoughtfully, AEBCD has the potential to shift the balance of power in service design by truly prioritising the voices of those with lived experience. The approach helps overcome common limitations of traditional research and service design by:

- Ensuring **diversity in representation**, capturing a wider range of experiences by inviting people from various cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic backgrounds to participate.
- Supporting **ongoing engagement** by encouraging participants to continue their involvement beyond initial workshops, fostering sustainable change and a sense of community.
- Emphasising **accessibility and adaptabilit**y, enabling local authorities to involve people who might otherwise face barriers in engaging with traditional research processes.

10 tips for using the AEBCD model in research

These 10 tips provide guidance on effectively applying AEBCD to your service development

1 ## Identify key people and organisations

The success of AEBCD relies on identifying stakeholders with influence and commitment to the process. Start by mapping out who will take on leadership roles, such as representatives from relevant departments, community leaders, and service providers. Securing involvement from stakeholders who hold decision-making power ensures that co-design recommendations can translate into real changes. Additionally, seek out organisations that can provide resources, whether funding for creating the catalyst film, technical support for the workshops, or insights into the community's needs. These connections can make the AEBCD process both impactful and sustainable.

2 ## Select a representative sample of people with lived experience (PWLE)

The diversity of group members directly impacts the quality and inclusivity of the findings from your workshops. Ensure that people with varied backgrounds, including age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender and sexuality, are represented. This prevents a group who are all similar from skewing results and increases the chances that the solutions generated will meet the needs of a wide range of individuals. Consider engaging trusted community figures to help identify participants from underrepresented or harder-to-reach groups, who can add vital voices to the process.

3 Assess the Value of Pre-Existing Relationships

Consider whether to include groups with established relationships or to bring together individuals who are new to each other. Groups with existing bonds may communicate openly and feel more at ease sharing personal experiences, which can foster a more dynamic and empathetic dialogue. On the other hand, bringing together participants without prior relationships can introduce fresh perspectives, and challenge assumptions. Tailor the approach to your goals—if trust-building is key, prior connections can be beneficial, whereas for new perspectives, building new relationships during the project may be preferable.

4 Allocate time for building trust

Building trust among group members creates a foundation for open, honest, and meaningful discussions. Begin with icebreakers and team-building activities that allow people to get to know each other and the facilitators in a relaxed environment. Trust can also be built by establishing clear expectations of confidentiality and respect within the group. Providing time for informal conversations and one-on-one check-ins with facilitators can help group members feel valued and comfortable, setting the stage for a cooperative and supportive experience.

5 Set clear workshop guidelines using skilled facilitators

The role of a skilled facilitator is crucial in guiding discussions, managing emotions, and keeping the group on track. A facilitator sets the tone by establishing ground rules that promote mutual respect, confidentiality, and an open-minded atmosphere. Clear guidelines can also prevent potential conflicts and make participants feel secure, knowing that their input will be valued and their voices heard. Skilled facilitators help ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to contribute, which is essential for a balanced and productive workshop.

6 Encourage long-term involvement of co-design members

Lasting change often requires continuous input, so offering group members the opportunity to remain engaged in the project beyond the initial co-design process can enhance their impact. Invite members to periodic follow-up sessions to review progress and provide further input, or even to help with the application of specific initiatives. Long-term involvement fosters a sense of ownership and allows the co-design process to evolve with group member insights over time, creating a more sustainable and community-rooted outcome.

7 Provide protected time for paid staff in the co-design process

Allocate dedicated hours for staff to fully participate in the co-design process without having to juggle other work responsibilities. Protected time enables them to contribute thoughtfully and without distraction, ensuring that they remain actively engaged and supportive of the initiative. This approach also helps recognize and respect their involvement as a valued part of their work.

8 Clarify processes, roles, and expectations from the start

Clearly defining the objectives, processes, and individual roles within the project sets a foundation for accountability and mutual understanding. Provide participants with a roadmap of the project phases, specific milestones, and how their contributions will fit into the larger picture. This transparency helps prevent misunderstandings, keeps participants aligned with project goals, and allows them to focus on meaningful contributions rather than process-related concerns.

9 Create a well-sized group to reflect diverse communities

Group size is key to ensuring effective discussion and representation. Aim for a group that is small enough for all voices to be heard but large enough to capture a broad range of perspectives. While smaller groups may work for in-depth conversations, larger groups might be better for capturing varied viewpoints. Ensure that the group reflects the diversity

of the community, so the solutions developed are relevant and inclusive.

10 Ensure Accessibility and Adaptations for All Participants

Accessibility is essential for full engagement. This could mean providing translators, accommodating physical disabilities, or adapting the format of meetings for virtual attendance if travel is a barrier. By anticipating and addressing these needs, you create a more inclusive environment where everyone, regardless of their circumstances, can participate fully. This also shows a commitment to respecting each person's unique needs and ensures that marginalised voices are represented and valued.

The potential future applications of this approach are promising, especially when compared to more traditional 'top down' approaches. The AEBCD model offers deeper community involvement when developing tailored interventions. The use of a catalyst film with real voices from the community can help foster empathy and a deeper level of understanding of the issues that are being addressed. By involving participants directly in the design process, this can have a positive impact by enhancing a sense of agency and connection, whilst contributing to positive changes and improvements in service delivery. Adapting AEBCD to ensure greater inclusivity and accessibility makes it a powerful tool for reaching a broad range of individuals, especially those who might otherwise be marginalised in more traditional design processes.

Furthermore, the AEBCD model is adaptable, and has the potential to be applied in many areas, such as mental health care, support for individuals with learning difficulties, and those experiencing frailty and old age. By fostering collaboration, this approach can lead to sustainable improvements for both service users and providers.

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