

# WAYS OF BEING, KNOWING, AND DOING OUR CO-DESIGN SYMPOSIUM

In July, IPANZ joined with some very skilled partners to run an online co-design symposium. IPANZ has been privileged to work and learn from them and all the presenters at the symposium. Shenagh Gleisner outlines some of the insights.



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Allen + Clarke



**Desna Whaanga-Schollum**  
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**Debbie Goodwin**  
Tuakana Teina



**Penny Hagen**  
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The aim of this symposium was to inform our members about co-design and to inspire further exploration of this mahi. The symposium attracted our limit of 140 registrations. There were another 45 to 50 on the waiting list. Taking part were 108 public servants from 29 different agencies. Others were from private firms, NGOs, and local authorities.

This article aims to draw out some insights from this symposium and to invite you all into the conversation about where to next for the public sector on co-design.

## What is co-design?

Co-design is a range of methodologies for involving people in the design of the services, strategies, environments, policies, and processes that will impact them.

Co-design methodologies are used in many contexts, for example, with industry stakeholders for developing policies or with clinicians and patients to develop health services. The focus of this symposium was on whānau, working with tangata whenua in the context of Te Tiriti.

The title of the symposium “ways of being, knowing, and doing” is important. The symposium was not about imparting a set of skills or providing a tool box or checklist on what to do. Its central message was that through being and knowing, doing evolves.

## Why did IPANZ support this kaupapa?

In February 2020, IPANZ contacted The Southern Initiative and the Auckland Co-design Lab to start a conversation about getting co-design understood among public servants. IPANZ then started working with the Lab, Ngā Aho, Tuakana Teina, and Allen + Clarke to create this symposium.

We know that many IPANZ members want to know more about co-design. We had three overriding reasons for wanting to run this symposium.

- 1. To demonstrate culturally grounded practices.** We were aware of how hard it is for the public service to work in partnership with whānau. The Public Service Act strengthened the authorising environment for taking courageous steps to build Māori-Crown relations. Public servants are very keen to learn – the overwhelming response to this symposium was evidence of a desire to do better. But there is a great deal to learn.
- 2. To stop the misuse of the term “co-design”.** The word co-design had become widely used, but we’ve heard it being misused, abused, and not understood. We particularly heard the mistrust that tangata whenua have of the word. According to the report *Co-Design in New Zealand*, “Co-design has, in some spaces, already become a fancy word for consultation, or to infer a degree of power sharing, participation and partnership that never really existed.”\*
- 3. To support system change in the public service.** We knew how hard co-design is within the public service. Co-design requires genuine sharing of power. The outcomes evolve and are hard to specify in advance. The capability to do this work is developing and the system barriers are not insurmountable. We wished to show IPANZ members that it is possible to do co-design – and to do it well.

## What did IPANZ learn in developing the symposium?

The journey of preparing this symposium was a profound learning process for IPANZ. We felt that embracing the underlying premise of co-design could enhance public servants’ ability to partner with, share power with, collaborate with, and devolve to Māori – it would be a powerful force to contribute to the fulfilment of the promise of the Public Service Act.

## What are some memorable insights?

This is a snapshot of some of the gems that IPANZ had taken away.

### *Meet as people*

You meet as people, not as an agency. You talk about aspirations, not needs. You ask “not what is the matter with whānau, but what matters to whānau”. You try to “collapse the space” between your agency and whānau. You curate the space where whānau see and feel their culture and values. What does the kawa look like for this whānau in this place? The place is one that is mutually reached. Some of the starting points might include “How might we ...?”

### *Share power*

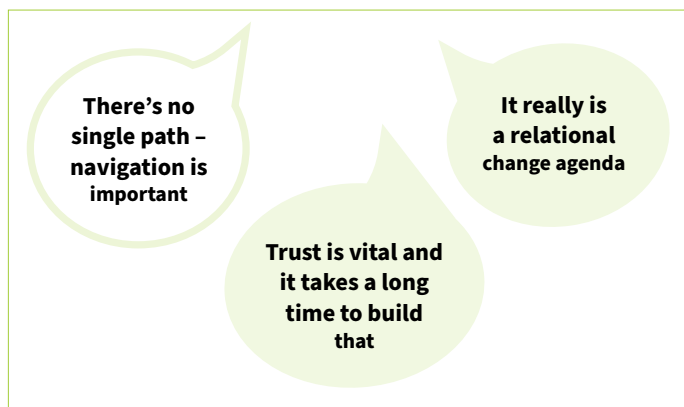
Acknowledge the power imbalance. Be honest about any constraints on the sharing of power. Find small tangible ways of redressing the power imbalance. Start with a whānau-centric model, where the power and the knowledge rests with whānau. The lived experience is the essence of this, not an add-on. Whānau are used to living in complexity – trust their instincts. Power sharing creates more power (to act and achieve); it does not take away from anyone. The approach can be rigorous, including the use of models, prototyping, and testing, but this work is done with whānau, not to or for them.

### *Build trust over time*

While trust is fundamental, you cannot assume that any agency will be trusted. Walking alongside a Māori organisation, or a Māori design partner, might be a starting point to building trust. A Māori organisation can make it “safe to fail”, know how to keep the whānau and you safe, and know how to help you “be” and “do” in a way that creates opportunities for change. So, find someone to work with. All public servants can act as the intermediary within their departments to ensure the partnership is maintained. Don't waste the precious time of iwi who already have many demands on them.

### *Incorporate this different way of being and doing into your kete*

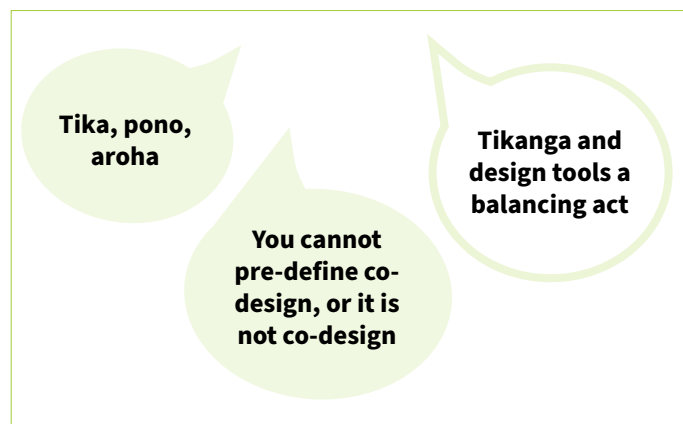
This is a very different public service approach. The outcomes emerge; they are not imposed. It may not turn out as you



anticipated – it may be better! You are a change agent through relationships, supporting whānau-led aspirations. Scale can be achieved through whānau to whānau connections. You cannot be certain about how long it will take; the pace belongs to all participants. You will need to avoid design processes that put emphasis on process but not on the relationships, people, principles, or values that underpin the process. You may be used to producing quick fixes, but this work is longer term. This is likely to go beyond the capacity of one organisation.

### *Create helpful authorisation*

There are parts of the system that create barriers. Get the support of your manager in the first instance. There will be challenges and opportunities to influence system changes, for example, the allocation of time, procurement rules, different types of contracts, new KPIs, and accountability. Try to suggest solutions to your colleagues. Allow whānau to tell stories on the impact on their lives from having participated in the co-design mahi, enable them to tell their stories to more senior people. These stories are powerful and a great start.



## Where next for the public sector?

IPANZ appreciates that some of what we have summarised may feel alien. You may be used to defining the problem you are trying to alleviate; you will be accustomed to clarity about the outcomes you are trying to achieve; you may be concerned about time pressure when results are urgently demanded.

This is not about turning away from the principles and values and the spirit of service. It is about having the awareness, the mindset, and the capabilities to apply co-design for the right issue, with the right people in the right place. It is “when” not “if”, and it is “and” not “or”.

Co-design is not a comprehensive approach for all aspects of public service work: no one would claim that it should or could replace all the valued delivery of services. But the status quo is powerful and can block new and different ways of operating that could be more effective in the right circumstances.

\* To read the full report, go to <https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/media/1900/co-design-in-aotearoa-new-zealand-a-snapshot-of-the-literature-s-mark-p-hagen-tsi-june-2020.pdf>

## Transformation begins by acknowledging our own power and privilege

### Gradually shifting the authorising environment

#### The longer-term challenge

Is it worth establishing a mechanism to pursue this kaupapa? It could be an influential forum, think tank, taskforce, or working group. It would need to be drawn from across the sector and of course engage whānau in the deliberations. It would need to involve senior people with an in-depth understanding of public service systems and processes and the rationale behind them – who also have an open mind about change. This forum would need to be in place for some years to gradually realise the potential for a shift in culture, behaviours, incentives, accountability, funding flows, and governance to help this mahi thrive where it can make a difference.

Questions would be explored, such as:

- In what circumstances should co-design be the predominant approach?
- How can we adjust the incentives, soft and hard, to support its use?
- What aspects of our systems and processes create barriers and can be gradually changed?
- How can we support ongoing evaluative inquiry into the impacts?
- How can we build the capability to work in this way?

### Individual actions can make a difference right now

#### In the short term, much is possible

Individual public servants do not have to wait for their seniors to act or for the authorisation to be secure. There are three things that we can all do immediately:

1. **Build cultural capability.** Public servants are building their capability. Ask “How deeply do I understand the cultural context of the people I am working with?”
2. **Shift your mindset.** For this type of work, public servants act more as change agents than as service providers. Ensure you are open to these ways of working and look for opportunities to apply co-design methodologies.
3. **Notice the unexpected benefits and tell the stories!** You will hear stories about how this work assists people to shape the things that influence their lives. Allow those stories to be heard. Step back so others can step forward.

**Humility,  
willingness,  
honesty**

**Can't project  
manage our  
way through**

## Continued Demand for Policy Professionals

We are well into 2021 and the market continues to thrive! There is a strong demand for policy professionals across a number of sectors in response to new government initiatives being rolled out. A high volume of priority work programmes and ambitious Ministers means a fast-moving contract market with a demand for seasoned Policy Contractors who can turn their hands to a range of complex policy issues. On the permanent side we have a range of opportunities available for Senior Policy Analysts with an aptitude for cross-agency collaboration and partnership.

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To have a confidential chat about your options contact Kirsty Brown or Gemma Odams - 04 4999471



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