

Learning from COVID-19: A tool for capturing insights now to shape the future

COVID-19 has created a burning platform for change that is requiring local stakeholders to think and act like a system, in ways we could have never before have imagined. Things that were previously thought impossible have been achieved in a matter of weeks, as people and organisations pull together united in a new collective purpose, adopt radical new practice, and organise in new ways. Collaboration between public services, the third sector and communities is moving at pace, and there's a spotlight on the critical value of community action.

We know that many people and organisations involved in these changes are interested in learning from new practice today in order to sustain change for tomorrow. What should we keep doing once the crisis has passed? What benefits can come from these new ways of working? What will it take to sustain new approaches and relationships?

Why learning is important

Learning is most usefully understood as a continuous process which drives adaptation and improvement. Right now there is a unique chance to understand and consolidate what we are learning from different parts of the system, identifying behaviours and practice that could have lasting benefits and inform future norms.

Key principles that are particularly important in the current context are:

- Learning happens in real time. It's crucial to capture insights as they happen to identify immediate opportunities to flex and adapt.
- Learning is a process of paying attention to what you do, how you do it, and how it feels. It's about valuing and acting on the things you and the people you work with notice and experience in your day-to-day work.
- Learning requires an openness to learn both from what is working and what isn't. Learning is a collaborative process. It requires a willingness to learn from other people's perspectives as well as your own.
- Learning is about action. It requires the creation of spaces where people can bring together what they're learning and identify how to act on this.

This learning framework

Collaborate CIC has therefore designed this free, open-access learning framework for people working in organisations (of any shape, size, form) who are providing support to the public – from local authorities and charities, to community groups and health services. The framework is intended to be simple and accessible in a time of pressure. We hope it offers an entry point that will assist you, your colleagues, your organisation and the partners you work with to capture insights as they arise from new personal, organisational and community practices. See below for how we can help you use it if you are under pressure.

How to use this framework

We have divided the framework into two parts:

1. Surfacing insights: 8 questions which can help you identify how you, your organisation, and the system are thinking and working in new ways.
2. Deepening insights: short sets of questions focussed around five key themes, giving you the chance to reflect on and interrogate your learning more deeply.

This framework can be used by you as an individual, your team, your organisation, or a collaboration. Here are some suggestions for how you can capture and make sense of the learning:

- Identify someone who will **coordinate the learning efforts** to make it easy for others to gather and share insights as part of their busy roles. This person might introduce the idea of and make the case for learning together, and support the steps outlined below.
- Agree **what information you want to collect** – what is it important that we record, so that we can collectively learn?
- Agree **how you will gather information** e.g. journaling, learning logs (what have I learnt today? what patterns have I seen?), using data that already exists for the purposes of learning, interviews, shadowing.
- Identify **how you will come together to share and act on learning** e.g. team huddles, learning sessions, sharing insights with senior managers. For example, you might want to create peer reflection sessions where teams reflect together on a weekly basis. What did we do? What happened? What does this mean? Record what you learn, and share it with others - within and outside your organisation.
- **Create a learning culture:** it is important to create an environment where it is ok to talk about uncertainty and things that aren't working. Everyone will be feeling uncertain. Everyone will be making mistakes. Reassure people that this is normal and the opportunity is in learning together.

The framework: Learning from COVID-19

8 questions which can help you identify how you, your organisation, and the system are thinking and working in new ways.

Complete whichever sections are most relevant and helpful for you. You may want to complete the organisational and system sections based on your own perspective, or invite others to contribute their thoughts too.

In response to COVID-19...	Personal	Organisational	System
What have you started doing?			
What have you stopped doing?			
What are you doing more of?			

What are you doing less of?			
What is working well?			
What hasn't worked?			
What has this revealed about what support is effective and how best to deliver it?			
In ten years' time, what's one thing you hope has changed as a result of the COVID19 response?			

Deepening insights

Short sets of questions focussed around five key themes, giving you the chance to reflect on and interrogate your learning more deeply. Reflect on practice at a personal, organisational and/or system level as relevant. Again, you may want to answer these questions on your own, or with others.

Theme	Question	Reflection – what have you observed or learnt, and how might you act on this (immediately or in the longer term)?
Collaboration	What examples of collaboration are you seeing?	
	Who are the key actors involved? Are there any people/organisations who you wouldn't typically expect to collaborate with?	
	What was the context for collaboration before COVID-19? What enabling conditions, if any, were already in place?	
	What factors have helped people and organisations to collaborate in response to COVID-19?	
Leadership	Anyone can demonstrate leadership, whatever their level of seniority. Where in the system have you noticed effective leadership?	

	What leadership qualities have been most effective during the crisis?	
	Have leaders adapted their approach to the context? If so, how and what difference has this made?	
	Are decisions being made differently? How?	
Community	How have communities mobilised in your area?	
	How are you and your organisation/system working with communities? What's different?	
	What's working well?	
Reimagining what we value	Has the COVID-19 crisis made you think differently about measurement, targets and what we value? If so, how?	
	Do you have any more flexibility in your work e.g. in how you use and prioritise resources?	
	If you have more flexibility in your role, what are you doing/using instead to guide your decision making?	
	What has enabled you to take a different approach?	
Behaviours	What behaviours have been most valuable for responding to this crisis?	
	Where in the system have you seen these behaviours being demonstrated?	
	What has surprised you about your own response?	
	What has surprised you about how others around you have responded?	

	<p>What behaviours and skills do you want to hold onto once we have moved past the crisis response?</p>	
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How Collaborate can help

We know everyone is busy with the day to day, so we're also **offering our support as a learning partner to organisations and systems with a view to supporting longer term change in thinking, culture and practice after the crisis.** We can use this framework to carry out rapid system diagnostics with places, including short interviews with stakeholders from across the system to capture insights about the changes that are taking place, what they value and what they want to keep hold of. We will capture these insights in a short report with some questions and recommendations for local partners to discuss further down the line.

When the immediate crisis passes, there will be more space to explore what these insights tell us and how we'd like to use them to shape a 'new normal'. Collaborate is experienced in supporting organisations in these kinds of conversations and translating innovation and learning into new models of practice. *Please get in touch if you would value this offer now as a way to bank insights for the next phase of public service reform and place-based change in your place.*

We hope this framework can support you to capture learning in these challenging times (and beyond). We are interested in what you are learning and how you do it, so we encourage you to get in touch and tell us about your reflections and how you have used the framework. You can contact us on Twitter [@CollaborateCIC](#) and via [email](#).

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