



Co-creation: Its Roots, Some Strategies, and a Story
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Co-creation: Its Roots, Some Strategies and a Story

Listening to the news right now is more of a struggle than usual. Conflict, conflict, conflict, everywhere. Mammoth international discord. Regions ablaze. So many countries with such consequential infighting. All this makes me want to retreat to my warm bed and pull the covers tight.

The writing of this paper is a response to this state of affairs. This paper takes up the idea of *co-creation*, a collaborative way to solve problems that is deeply rooted in trust and respect.

I believe that understanding and adoption of *co-creation* can lead to workable solutions for problems big and small.

My purpose, therefore, in offering this writing is to explain *co-creation* so that the interested reader — especially a reader in the development context— may utilize this concept when demanding problems arise.

I structure the paper as follows: First, I write of the roots of co-creation. To do this, I summon the seminal work of business professors Coimbatore K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy. These authors' ideas, put forth more than 20 years ago, provide the roots —the mindset— for all contemporary models of co-creation. Second, I write of the strategies needed to put the co-creation mindset into practice. For this, I draw from my knowledge and experience as an educator, researcher and facilitator of many collaborative problem-solving events. I also turn to the work of design professor Jotte de Koning and her colleagues as well as the work of Flore Million for Oxfam. Third and finally, I offer a story that illustrates co-creation in practice. For this, I call upon the work of architects Khondaker Hasibul Kabir, Suhailey Farzana, their team, and the city of Jhenaidah.

Let's get started!

Co-creation: Its Roots

In the academic world, the concept of co-creation is attributed to business professors Coimbatore K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy.¹ Prahalad and Ramaswamy first put forward this concept in *Co-opting Consumer Competence* (2000). This article was published in the *Harvard Business Review* and has been cited 2658 times - an impressive number of citations for an academic article. Since its publication, the authors (and other close collaborators) have won prestigious awards for their thinking and have influenced a global audience in business, design, architecture, development and beyond.

So, what exactly did Prahalad and Ramaswamy say in this influential piece? The authors argued that companies would be more successful if they adopted a mindset of —or belief in— the competence of the consumer and then worked to co-create products with the consumer as a valued and equal partner.

To understand this declaration and its impact more fully, we need to briefly leave our contemporary world of social media influencers —who (smartly) engage followers on all aspects of product development, marketing and sales— and return to the 1990s. In contrast to current models of consumer engagement, most companies in the 1990’s followed a top-down model of product development in which a company’s internal experts were responsible for design, manufacture, and marketing. Sure, companies had external partners, but partners typically followed a do-as-asked delivery-on-time model. Moreover, consumers were not viewed as partners and were rarely asked for input on anything but the final product.

In *Co-opting Consumer Competence*, Prahalad and Ramaswamy rallied for a paradigm shift. The world, they wrote, is brimming with “major business discontinuities such as deregulation, globalization, technological convergences and the rapid evolution of the internet” (2000, p. 79). In this brave new world, they argued, a top-down model of product development was not sustainable. If businesses were to thrive, input from all stakeholders (e.g., designers, manufacturers, suppliers, investors, and most importantly, the consumer) would need to be harnessed. The inclusion of this previously untapped information would help get goods and services *right* and would result in a competitive advantage over companies that did not engage their stakeholders. The authors highlighted U.S.-based Walmart, Proctor and Gamble, Microsoft, and Cisco as companies that had leveraged stakeholder competence to robust competitive advantage.

Subsequent to *Co-opting Consumer Competence*, the idea of harnessing the power of consumer competence through co-creation evolved more fully through Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Ramaswamy (2009, 2011), Ramaswamy and Gouillart (2010), and Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2012, 2018, 2022).

From this body of work, two points about co-creation emerge:

1. The process of co-creation must start with the mindset or belief that the consumer and other stakeholders have deep understanding of their needs and potential solutions.
2. If trusted, this ecosystem of competence has the potential to provide innovative and consequential problem solving.

The “co-creation mindset” puts stakeholder competence at the center of problem solving. This mindset is rooted in trust - trust that stakeholders can articulate their needs and trust that stakeholders can determine solutions that will best meet their needs.

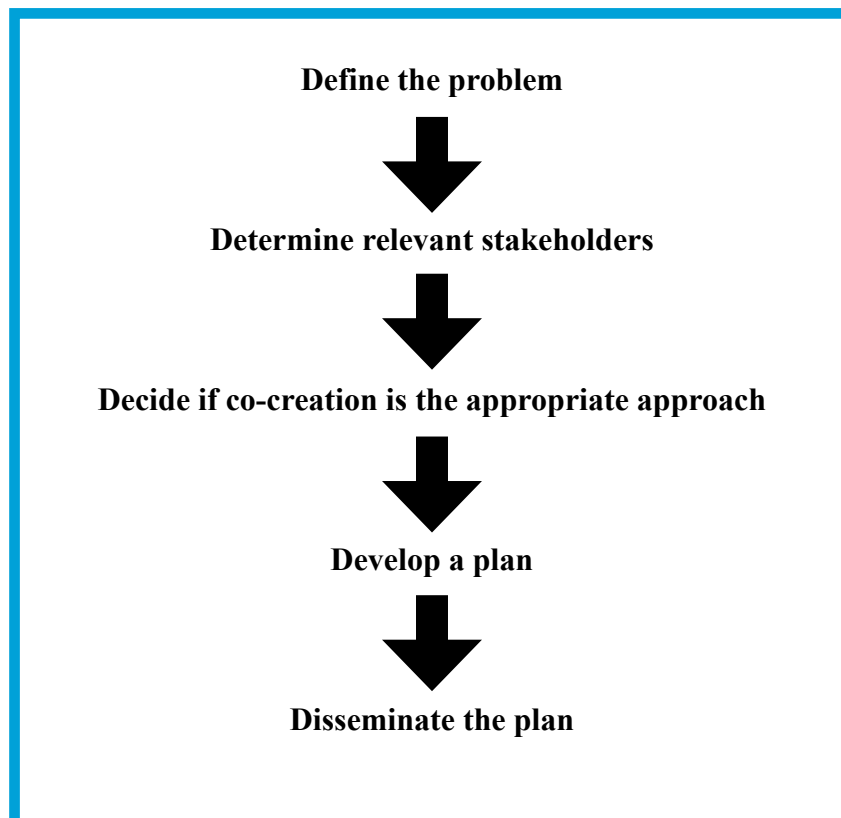
Co-creation: Some Strategies

In the last section of this paper, the co-creation mindset was defined. This mindset will be useful in many fields, but may be especially effective in the context of development. In fact, organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, USAID and OXFAM have each recognized the need to put stakeholder competence at the center of problem solving². Accordingly, the term *beneficiary* is used less often, and practices of participatory development have been revised to provide guidance for the integration of the co-creation mindset into project development and implementation.

This said, De Koning et al. (2016) write that there are at least 50 models of co-creation in the academic, business and popular press with no consensus on which model yields the most effective problem solving. To cut through this noise, and to offer the reader a way through, I now suggest a set of basic strategies for putting the co-creation mindset into practice.

With the workshop as the recommended platform for this practice, strategies are provided for (1) Big Picture Planning; (2) Individual Workshop Planning; and (3) Workshop Facilitation. With respect to all suggestions, and in accordance with a co-creation mindset, readers should judge if a particular strategy fits their cultural context or will require adjustments.

Big Picture Planning



Strategy 1: Define the problem.

With full knowledge that the problem will almost certainly be refined in the process of co-creation, define the problem.

Strategy 2: Determine relevant stakeholders.

List the stakeholders who can help solve the problem. Ensure the list includes a diversity of points of view, including those who are experiencing the problem and will benefit from a solution (end-users). Consider the availability of stakeholders. Consider the size of the group: A large group may offer an excellent range of viewpoints but may be slow to come to consensus. A smaller group may reach consensus much more quickly, but may not have sufficient diversity (Flores, 2022).

Strategy 3: Decide if co-creation is the appropriate approach.

If the problem can best be solved by the collective intelligence of multiple stakeholders with diverse points of view, and there is adequate time for a process, then co-creation is likely an appropriate approach (Flores, 2022; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000).³ If, however, a solution has already been determined, or if the solution is time sensitive, co-creation may not be the best approach (Flores, 2022).

Co-creation is an excellent approach to problem solving if diverse points of view are required AND there is adequate time to engage in big picture and workshop planning.

By way of example, think of the delivery of food, water, and medicine in a humanitarian crisis. If the crisis is yet to occur, stakeholders (government, aid agencies, suppliers, and those who have experienced such a crisis) should engage in co-creation toward a range of solutions for the anticipated problem. However, if a humanitarian crisis is full blown, now is not the time to engage in a lengthy process of co-creation; it is time to execute a solution.

Strategy 4: Develop a plan.

If co-creation is the right process for the problem, develop a plan. Include information about the goal of the process, the co-creation mindset, the range of stakeholders, the potential benefits to stakeholders (e.g., use of a product or service, learning, reimbursement for one's time), what stakeholders may be expected to contribute (e.g., time, knowledge, skills, resources), a timeline, and place of meeting. Consider the ways in which trust will be built with stakeholders.

As complete as this plan is, accept that in the co-creation process, you can not predict everything in advance nor can you set exact outcomes. This is part of the value of co-creation — with collective stakeholder competence, the process may be different than anticipated and the outcome may be so much greater than originally envisioned. (Million, 2022)

In creating the plan, try to think of barriers to participation (e.g., gender and cultural norms, childcare, missing paid work, distance to place of meeting, accessibility of meeting place) and address these.

Remember that it may not be necessary for all stakeholders to be present for the whole of the process. Individual stakeholders or specific groups of stakeholders may be required for the entire process, at the beginning, middle, or end, during a product-in-use phase, or some combination of these options. (De Koning et al., 2016)

Remember also that a stakeholder does not have to own a product to engage in the co-creation process (Ramaswamy, 2009). For example, a person does not have to own a house to fruitfully engage in a workshop about housing. In fact, the inclusion of such stakeholders will likely offer an important point of view and enrich the discussion accordingly.

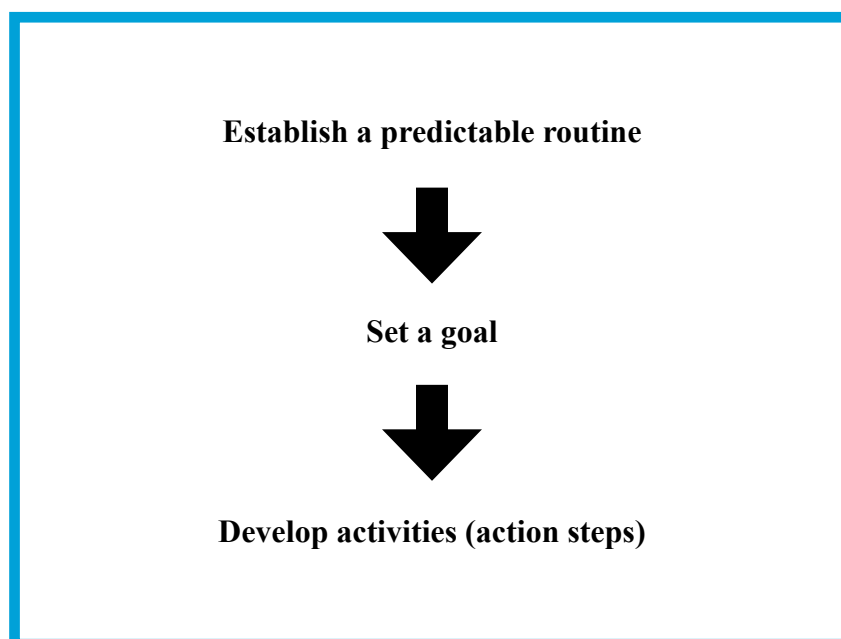
Finally, be prepared to deliver the plan in a way that meets the needs of stakeholders. For some stakeholders, a written plan will suffice. For other stakeholders, an oral presentation or conversation may be better. Visuals to support written or spoken ideas are usually appreciated. For stakeholders with specific needs (e.g., visual or hearing impairments), prepare accordingly.

Strategy 5: Disseminate the plan.

Seek feedback from stakeholders. Discuss. Adjust accordingly.

Workshop Planning

Once the big picture is in place, it is time to plan the finer details of a co-creation workshop or workshops. The workshop is the recommended platform for the practice (or process) of co-creation as the term workshop implies a hearty exchange of ideas and active engagement through doing.



Strategy 1: Establish a predictable routine.

People tend to work better when they know what to expect. People also tend to work better when their basic needs are met (e.g., hydration, healthy food, some physical movement such as walking from one activity to another). A routine that meets the needs of participants may go something like this: an opening with light refreshments; early morning activity; break with hydration, snack, and movement; late morning activity; lunch with movement; early afternoon activity; break with hydration, snack, and movement; closing activity and time for workshop feedback. Create your routine based on knowledge of context e.g., you may wish to include time for prayer or for parents to visit childcare. Share your proposed routine with participants early in your first workshop (or prior to your first workshop), gather feedback, and adjust the routine as needed.

Strategy 2: Set a goal.

Think about the purpose of the gathering. What can reasonably be accomplished by the end of the workshop? Convert this thinking into an action statement e.g., By the end of the day, the group will have drafted an 8-hour training plan for first year early childhood teachers. Be as clear as you can. Setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals may be helpful.⁴

Strategy 3: Develop activities (action steps).

For each activity, write a purpose (or sub-goal), describe all parts of the activity clearly, and explain the roles required in the activity (e.g., group leader, notetaker, timekeeper). Ensure that each activity builds toward the achievement of the goal of the workshop.

To address individual learning strengths, ensure a mix of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities (Flores, 2022).

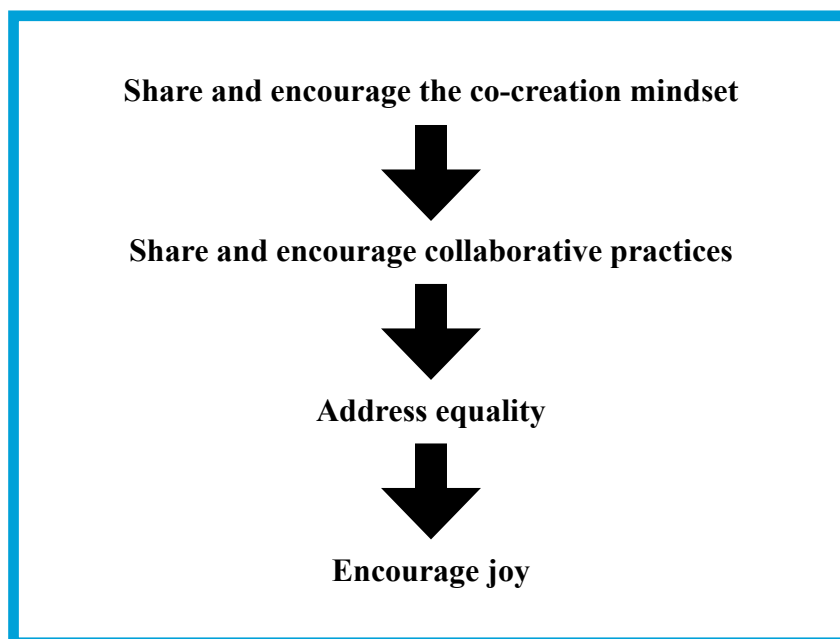
To address individual personalities (introvert, extrovert), ensure a mix of individual, small group and large group activities (Flores, 2022).

For each activity, list necessary materials and have the materials readily available.

Create a means of collecting workshop feedback (e.g., favorite parts, what needs to be changed for next time (Flores, 2022)).

Workshop Facilitation

What the facilitator or facilitation team communicates to workshop participants will determine, to a large extent, the success of the workshop. In terms of disposition, the facilitator needs to be welcoming, encouraging, and respectful. The facilitator needs to communicate this disposition in all communications (through speaking and listening, body language, and the written word).



Strategy 1: Share and encourage the co-creation mindset.

Perhaps the most important step a facilitator can take is to share the co-creation mindset with participants. This foundational belief, trust in and respect for one another, proclaims competence for every participant and declares that with the combined competence of the group, mountains will be moved (or, said differently, the group will determine innovative and consequential solutions to problems of great importance).

Early in the workshop experience, the facilitator should take time to share and discuss this information. Hopefully, time can be allotted for participants to share their competence (knowledge, skills, resources). For groups in which participants may struggle to name their competence, it may be helpful for the facilitator to list the broad range of competencies that will be required to successfully complete the project. The facilitator should ask participants to try and keep the co-creation mindset front of mind during all workshop activities — especially in times of disagreement and when roadblocks arise.

Strategy 2: Share and encourage collaborative practices.

Collaboration is at the heart of co-creation. Yet, collaborative practices are not intuitive. Collaboration requires that participants (1) listen fully to all other participants without interrupting; (2) find ways to appreciate what has been said, maintain a stance of non-judgment, and ask for clarifications as necessary; (3) when possible, build on the words of others; (4) respectfully disagree; (5) when necessary, finds way to reach agreement; and (6) be aware of ones' own speaking time so that everyone, regardless of gender and power structure, has the possibility of equal "air time."⁵

Early in the workshop experience, the facilitator should take time to share and discuss this information. The facilitator can offer examples of exemplary language, and participants can offer their own examples. Facilitators should lead by example and model collaborative practices (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2000).

Strategy 3: Address equality.

It goes without saying that all humans are equal. The co-creation mindset firmly makes this point. Collaborative practices help to put the point into practice.

To address equality in a process of co-creation, the facilitator should therefore (1) share and encourage the co-creation mindset, and (2) share and encourage collaborative practices.

As an additional point of information, it is sometimes helpful to convey to those participants with more traditionally recognized power (e.g., government officials, academic professors, research scientists, foundation officials) that they have a special burden in a process of co-creation with participants with less traditionally recognized power. They should be especially aware of the co-creation mindset and the importance of collaboration, and they should quite mindfully engage in related best practices.

Strategy 4: Encourage joy.

With a co-creation mindset and approach, the conditions for joy are palpable. You have a problem, but you also have a room full of people, each ready to bring their best and to contribute fully to creative problem solving. You have a workshop plan and a workshop routine that everyone is happy with. You also have agreed upon ways of interacting with one another that are full of respect and goodness. Co-creation done this way is about a generosity of spirit and human kindness. It is full of joy.

Co-creation: A Story

To exemplify co-creation in action in the development context, I turn now to the work of acclaimed architects Khondaker Hasibul Kabir and Suhailey Farzana. A married couple, Kabir and Suhailey identify as *community architects who work with the people*.⁶ So close is their alliance to the ideas of co-creation, they have, in fact, named their company *co.creation*

architects. I tell this story based on interviews with Kabir and Suhailey, a review of their published work, and the validation of my storytelling by Kabir and Suhailey.

Our story takes place in the bustling city of Jhenaidah. Located in southwestern Bangladesh, this city of approximately 250,000 people sits on the banks of the Nabaganga river. Rice is grown throughout the fertile river valley, and ancient mosques and Hindu temples dot the cityscape. Jhenaidah is governed by a mayor and a city council. With at least six institutes of higher learning, Jhenaidah has a strong focus on education.

This story details co-creation of a housing upgrade venture during the first phase of what has become known as the Mohishakundu Shordarpara project. This first phase included early idea development, early engagement with community people, and a first community workshop.⁷⁸ In what follows, the reader will see how Kabir, Suhailey, their team and the people of Jhenaidah used a co-creation mindset and co-creation strategies to produce a solid solution to an important problem.

Big Picture Planning

Strategy 1: Define the problem.

In 2015, Kabir and Suhailey moved to Jhenaidah, Kabir's hometown. As fully qualified architects with significant international experience, they turned to one another and posed a simple question: *With respect to the built environment, how can we be useful to the people and environment around us?* Soon, a plan emerged. Consistent with a co-creation mindset, the architects would go to low-income sections of Jhenaidah and ask the people *How can we make our living environment better together?* They would listen carefully and, in the process, start to build trusting relationships with the community.

Strategy 2: Determine relevant stakeholders.

From the outset, Kabir and Suhailey were not alone. Funding was granted by the *Asian Coalition for Community Action*. Other employees of co-creation architects joined as did architects from the *Community Architects Network*. And because in Bangladesh those with formal education (especially university education) often find ways to support those without similar privilege, architecture students and other young professionals from the *Platform of Community Action and Architecture* joined as well. Important outreach was made to the municipality of Jhenaidah, and awareness of the as-yet-defined initiative was generated.

Soon, Kabir, Suhailey, and this enthusiastic team of like-minded-colleagues-turned-stakeholders fanned out across low-income neighborhoods. In each neighborhood, they spoke to diverse groups of community members (men, women, and children), each time posing the question *How can we make our living environment better together?*

During these initial conversations, the team learned (1) about the hopes and dreams of the community people with respect to the living environment; (2) that there was no mechanism for

poor communities to connect with one another within the city of Jhenaidah; (3) that some mechanism for communal savings would be helpful in moving any project forward; and (4) communities had different levels of interest in participation in such a project.

Strategy 3: Decide if co-creation is an appropriate approach.

In this project, (1) the collective intelligence of multiple stakeholders was required to solve a problem, and (2) there was adequate time for a process. Co-creation was therefore determined to be an appropriate approach to the problem.

Strategy 4: Develop a plan.

Based on learning from initial conversations with the community people, a multi-layered initial plan was developed. Points included:

- (1) To learn more about the hopes and dreams of the community people with respect to living environment, and to determine project priorities and solutions, a formal meeting structure (the community workshop) would need to be established.
- (2) But before a community workshop would be helpful, and if the project was to be immersed in a co-creation mindset and approach, the community would need to lead. With no mechanism for connecting low-income communities and establishing a decision-making body (leadership) on behalf of the communities, what to do? The team floated the idea of the Jhenaidah Citywide Community Network to the relevant communities.
- (3) The project would also need a mechanism for communal savings. The team knew of a local NGO with expertise in this area. They would reach out for support. If the NGO was interested, their ideas would be brought to the Jhenaidah Citywide Community Network for consideration.
- (4) The project would need involvement from relevant political offices. The team planned for this outreach.

Strategy 5: Disseminate the plan.

The team took the plan to each of nine low-income communities, to the NGO with experience in communal savings, and to the relevant political offices. As appropriate, the plan was presented in oral or written form.

Following discussion, interested communities came forth to form the Jhenaidah Citywide Community Network.

The NGO with experience in communal savings agreed to support interested communities.

Relevant political offices agreed to observe the process.

Over time, the Jhenaidah Citywide Community Network and a leadership structure was established. The network with support from the architect team determined the criteria for selection of the first community to participate in the project. The network then chose the community.

The Network selected the community of Mohishakundu Shordarpara. This community consisted of 34 family-owned homes on 1.26 acres. With the support of the NGO with expertise in communal saving, the community had developed a women-led communal saving group with a good start in terms of savings. Perhaps most importantly, the community had expressed great interest in the project.

Workshop Planning

With the selected community in place, it was now time for the first workshop. The community suggested a date, time and venue, and the team of architects and community people collaborated on the pre-workshop planning.

This workshop was pure magic; overflowing, in fact, with smiles, laughter, and extraordinary thinking. To create this magic, the following strategies were enacted.

Strategy 1: Establish a predictable routine.

A predictable routine was established. In this, people's basic needs for hydration, healthy food and some movement was created. The morning started with warm welcomes, tasty chai, and an explanation of how the day would unfold including break times. The community provided a delicious lunch. There was plenty of light movement as participants moved from activity to activity. In addition, local musicians and poets provided entertainment.

Strategy 2: Set a goal.

The overall goal of the workshop was set: Community members would use their knowledge, skills, and resources to, with support of the architect team, begin to establish a plan to better the living environment.

To achieve this larger goal, sub-goals were established. The sub-goals were: By the end of the day, the group would: (1) draw pictures of their homes; (2) create a community map showing homes and the surrounding community; (3) describe problems with homes and the surrounding built environment; (4) prioritize problems; (5) discuss potential solutions to these problems, and (6) create a list of next steps.

Strategy 3: Develop activities (action steps).

Each sub-goal was assigned an activity so that by the end of the workshop, all sub-goals were addressed, and when all sub-goals were addressed, the overall goal of the workshop was attained.

The activities rolled out as follows:

Individuals created drawings of their current home. During the drawing activity, the architects circulated, asking questions so that the pictures were detailed e.g., Where does cooking take place? Do you have animals? Where do the animals live? When the drawings were finished, community members (with much laughter) shared their creations.

Individuals then met in small groups to create a community map. In this, individual homes were mapped in the context of the wider physical neighborhood. Each group collaborated to accurately include, for example, information about roads, water, sanitation, and electricity. An architect

joined each group — not to lead, but to ask exploratory questions about the emerging map.

Small groups and then the whole group worked to identify problems with homes and the surrounding built environment.

The whole group then worked to prioritize which problems should be addressed. It was determined that individual homes should be upgraded.

The whole group began to identify solutions to this problem. Individuals drew pictures and constructed models of their ideal upgraded dream homes. These were then shared.

At the end of the day, the whole group established the set of practical next steps necessary to begin to make their dreams a reality.

Workshop participants, it should be noted, included mostly women and children including those with special needs such as the elderly and physically disabled. Many community men did not participate as they were away at paid work.

Workshop Facilitation

Strategy 1: Share and encourage the co-creation mindset.

From their first conversations with the community, Kabir, Suhailey and their team explicitly put forth the idea that *We each come with knowledge and skills. When we put our knowledge and skills together, we can co-create a solution.*

In addition to explicitly stating this idea, the team implicitly restated it through at least two practices: (1) Throughout the process, the team engaged in active listening. They listened fully and then asked questions to clarify their understanding (instead, alternatively, of jumping in with the thoughts and ideas of the more formally educated). (2) The team created workshop activities in which the community people's competence would be encouraged and would largely determine the identification of the priority problem and its solution. During these activities, the team pointed out that it was the people who had identified the problem and had largely determined solutions.

Strategy 2: Share and encourage collaborative practices.

Kabir, Suhailey and their team did not offer explicit guidance on collaborative practices with respect to speaking and listening; instead, they modeled these practices throughout interaction with the community.

As noted previously, in situations in which people with more traditionally recognized power (e.g., people with more formal education) come together with people with less traditionally recognized power, it is especially important for those with more traditional power to model collaboration. The team certainly accomplished this.

Strategy 3: Address equality.

Kabir, Suhailey and their team (1) explicitly shared the co-creation mindset, and (2) implicitly shared or modeled collaborative practices.

In addition, the team lobbied for equality in terms of leadership of the project. With the idea that the communities (not the outside architect team) should lead on crucial decisions (e.g., the choice of community for the first stage of the project) but without a mechanism for doing so, the team suggested the creation of the Jhenaidah Citywide Community Network.

Moreover, the team ensured that all participants, especially women and girls, had equal opportunity to bring their ideas forward. Interestingly, at the beginning conversations-with-community-members stage of the project, men were the de facto leaders of the community. Prior to this project, they were the ones who met with local authorities, negotiated on behalf of the community, and organized events. In this process of co-creation, and with the absence of men due to paid work responsibilities, women emerged as capable project leaders on all aspects of finance, design, and construction.

Finally, in the selection of homes to be upgraded and in what order, the Jhenaidah Citywide Community Network prioritized the most vulnerable community members. The Network considered such equality-related factors as household income, health status of family members, family structure (two-parent family versus one-parent family), and the condition of the home.

Strategy 4: Encourage joy.

Kabir, Suhailey and their team rooted this project in the co-creation mindset of human competence and then enacted it through collaborative strategies. The project certainly involved hard work and careful planning, but it was also characterized by respect, kindness, and a generosity of spirit. This is not to say that there were not bumps in the road and extra problems to be solved along the way, but in the final analysis, this was a project filled with joy.⁹

Epilogue

As judged by its goal of creating a better living environment for one community, the Mohishakundu Shordarpara project must be judged an overwhelming success. After the early stage of the project as described above, the project proceeded as follows: After more community workshops and next-step lists, as well as the contribution of necessary professionals like engineers, two pilot homes were successfully upgraded. The community then took the lead on the upgrade of an additional 26 homes in Mohishakundu Shordarpara. This means that 28/34 or 82% of the homes in Mohishakundu Shordarpara were upgraded. In addition, 17 homes in a near-by community were integrated into the Mohishakundu Shordarpara project and were upgraded as well. During the length of this project, the community required the support of Kabir, Suhailey and their team less and less. The architect team slowly faded into a position of background support while, at the same time, the competence of the community shone brighter and brighter.

With respect to other points: After their initial period of observation, the mayor became an advocate for the project, and the municipality stepped in to support in many ways including, for example, canceling building permit fees. Architects and other builders soon heard of the project and began to visit. Eventually, the project was scaled to 20 additional cities by the BRAC University Urban Development Program. Significantly, the community leaders of the Mohishakundu Shordarpara project (two women named Sharifa Akhter and Tahmina Begum) continued their leadership roles in the expanded project and traveled to project cities to inspire, motivate and teach the people and policymakers about how to co-create toward better living.¹⁰ Kabir, Suhailey and their team increased the scope of their engagement with the people of Jhenaidah, eventually working in a similar way on the Nabaganga river. For this work, based in the co-creation mindset and strategies, Kabir and Suhailey were awarded the global *Aga Khan Award for Architecture* (2022).¹¹

Summary and Conclusions

In this paper, I presented *co-creation* as a collaborative way to solve problems that is deeply rooted in trust and respect - one person for every other. Through this, I had three goals: First, I hoped that by providing information about the roots of co-creation, the reader would understand the *co-creation mindset*. Second, I hoped that by providing information on strategies, the reader would understand the *co-creation process*. Third, I hoped that by offering a story, the reader would be able to envision *co-creation* in practice.

With this knowledge in hand, it is my ultimate wish that the reader will now be able to imagine the mindset and process of co-creation in their own projects — in domains as diverse as health, housing and education, all, of course, in the complicated context of climate change.

I'll be so interested to hear where this thinking takes you!

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Endnotes

¹De Koning, Crul & Wever (2016) point out that in writing about consumer participation in product development, Czepiel (1990) and Song and Adams (1993) provide Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) with points on which to build.

²For exemplary user-friendly co-creation resources, see [USAID](#) and [OXFAM](#). For co-creation standards for collaboration among government, civil society and other stakeholders, see [Open Government Partnership](#).

³While adequate time for the process must be considered, an approximate endpoint for the process should also be contemplated. Processes without established endpoints may go much longer than necessary, may “lose steam” and may not attain project goals.

⁴For information on SMART goals, see [Forbes Business Advisor](#).

⁵For easy-to-digest information on collaborative practices, see [Team Building](#).

⁶Kabir and Suhailey requested that they be referred to by their first names. This contrasts with the typical use of last names in a paper such as this.

⁷Data for this story was collected over a period of two years largely through interviews, conversations and personal correspondence with Khondaker Hasibul Kabir. The [written work](#) and [video production](#) of Khondaker Hasibul Kabir and Suhailey Farzana was also utilized. Kabir and Suhailey kindly read drafts of this paper and signed off on my telling of their story.

⁸According to De Koning, Crul & Wever (2016), models of co-creation may be differentiated according to (1) when co-creation is integrated into the product design process (beginning, middle, end, and/or product-in-use); (2) the direct benefit to the product user (high, medium, low); and (3) the level of collaboration between the product developer and the product user (high, medium, low).

Using this framework, the model of co-creation used in the Mohishakundu Shordarpara project may be described as *community design* in which (1) co-creation took place throughout the project from beginning to end including product-in-use; (2) high direct benefit for end-users; and (3) high level of collaboration among stakeholders.

⁹Bumps in the road are explained in [Khondaker & Farzana](#).

¹⁰Here are examples of the community’s response to this project:

Sharifa Khatun (Community Leader) “People do not value the work that we do alone. But when we work together, the impact is stronger and the work is better and more sustainable. In other people's eyes, this community was a slum. Now people don’t call our community a slum anymore, although we are the same people living in the same area. But now we are living in

better houses that we built by ourselves. We have decided to rename our community as Shopnopara, which means Dream Community. And it is like a dream for us, since we could never even think of making this kind of change before.” (Khondaker & Farzana, 2017)

Sharifa Khatun (Community Leader) “I like my house. It used to be depilated and fragile, now it is 2-story with possibility to expand. Previously, no-one gave my family respect or came to my house. Now government officials and many other people come to see and are impressed.... Now, I work with communities. I advise how to go to the municipality for permission. I help with design and securing money from a community savings group.... The mayor knows me and asks me for help in solving problems. He invites me to community events, and I am a VIP.” (Interview with Hurley and Khondaker, 2024).

Shondha Rani (Community Member) “Previously, our houses were dilapidated and made with corrugated iron sheets and bamboo mats. When there was heavy rain and strong winds, we suffered a lot. Later we got together, saved together, planned together and built better houses together in our community. We built solid brick houses, with two rooms. Some of the new houses are one storied and some have two stories. Now the rain and strong winds are not a big problem for us. We have planted vegetables, fruit trees and flowering plants around our houses. Our children are very happy to get better houses. Previously the community was not clean. Now the whole community has become cleaner and greener, and many outsiders feel good to visit our community.” (Khondaker & Farzana, 2017)

¹¹For coverage of *Urban River Spaces, Jhenaidah*, see [Aga Khan Awards for Architecture \(2022\)](#).