



*Insights Capture with*

# STATES<sub>OF</sub> CHANGE



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## 2020 After Shock Dialogue Network – Event report

### About this document

The COVID-19 coronavirus crisis of 2020 has been a significant shock to governments, societies and economies. The OECD, through its Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, has collaborated with like-minded organisations and conveners to capture key insights from relevant events to inform global discussions about the crisis, its aftermath and the implications for governments and their roles. This event report is one of a series of reports developed through the [2020 After Shock Dialogues Network](#).



### Dialogue Session with States of Change – Highlights of the Learning Festival

This document provides an overview of some of the key messages, insights and take-aways from the States of Change Learning Festival held from 1-19 June 2020. This overview has been done in cooperation between States of Change and the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation as part of the 2020 After Shock Dialogues Network, a network to share, and build upon, insights relevant to the ongoing unfolding of the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis and those involved in public purpose work. This will help inform, among other things and events, the discussions at *Government After Shock* on 17-18 November 2020.

### A high-level view of the Learning Festival

The Learning Festival was 40 online sessions taking place over three weeks, involving over 1600 participants from 78 countries and presenters from 15 cities. It was an opportunity to take stock of the things being seen during the crisis, but in a playful and creative way. It was intended as both a global conversation around different experiences and a ‘container’ for sensemaking, an opportunity to hold a collective space open for all the things rapidly occurring.

### What is the relationship of the Learning Festival to the crisis?

The COVID-19 coronavirus crisis has been one of the largest shocks that has hit all of the world at the same time – a shared moment in history. In such a crisis it is important to both come together and demonstrate solidarity, but also to be learning from whoever has relevant experiences. The aim for the Learning Festival was to help be custodians of what is good in this moment, and seeking to witness, preserve and analyse.

### What was the focus of the Learning Festival?

Government and public servants have often been ‘brow-beaten’ over the last 30 years with New Public Management and neoliberalism painting a dim view of them. The last six months has seen a

very different picture emerging, including of government as guarantor of last resort. The Learning Festival was intended to feed into this moment and help amplify the role that government and public servants have in creating great social outcomes. The excuses or the limitations of what government was capable of were shown to be irrelevant – not just because of the urgency of the situation but because it crystalised anew what the role of government is and can be. The Festival gave people a chance to pause, reflect and mutual empathy.

### What were some of the highlights or points of reflection?

- The timing of the Festival and its concurrence with a focus on the #BlackLivesMatter movement - having spaces for reflection, solidarity and optimism took on a new mean. And raised necessary , and questions about who's voices are heard in events like these and how crises can exacerbate and magnify inequality and injustice
- The opening address by Tyson Yunkaporta on and how Indigenous thinking can save the world, which provided some different ways of thinking that were very human as opposed to the technocratic approaches often favoured in the public sector
- Discussions about 'radical urgency' again, heightened by the context as well as fed by the participants own restlessness to seize this moment for positive change
- The combination of perspectives from the edges of society, radical reframings and bottom-up examples of change on the ground
- The combination of experience, theory and emotion brought into each session.

### What were some of the key take-aways?

- There is a community of practitioners out there who are willing and able to be activated and engaged, but that also need to be recognised and valued.
- The crisis has been a moment for people to rehearse behaviours and values that have long been advocated (agile, experimental, data-driven, willing to try new things, humble, collaborative, digital) and shown that public servants and their systems are capable of acting in this way, but we need to find and maintain that vision going forward.
- Government is a marathon, not a sprint. The public service can work at speed, but there needs to be pacing so that public servants are not burnt out.
- There is a risk that everyone goes back to their old ways of working, and thus there is a need to capture all the novel practices and embed that in the traditional systems of capability development (e.g. learning and development) so that they are not lost over time.
- There is a need for a new array of roles and government functions, that must be combined with institutional experimentation and creative and considered processes of decommissioning. How do governments create space for letting things go, given that the current crisis has shown, a number of institutions may no longer be fit for purpose or design for the current (and changeable) context?
- Now, in the light of the crisis where different things were possible, is an opportunity for changing some of the long-held or tightly-established ideas and expectations around what the roles and relationships should be between citizens and governments and between different tiers of government. There is a new muscle-memory of collaboration within the system that should be built upon. How do we sustain this for other challenges that have been regarded as too hard?

## What would you add to the three 'Government After Shock' questions?

What do we need to leave behind (both from before and during the crisis)?	What do we want to keep (both from before and during the crisis)?	What should we do differently?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the attitudes or beliefs that are no longer helpful for us and reinforcing a system that's not fit for purpose?</li> <li>• We need to embrace the idea of "creative decommissioning" – intentionally, and fairly, helping wind down ideas to make room for the new.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a community of practitioners out there who are willing and able to be activated and engaged, but that also need to be recognised and valued.</li> <li>• The crisis has been a moment for people to rehearse behaviours and values that have long been advocated (agile, experimental, data-driven, willing to try new things, humble, collaborative, digital)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn how to use the muscle-memory (e.g. collaboration, agility, experimentation) acquired during the crisis in other contexts</li> <li>• Learn how to build relationships and to foster collaboration outside of a crisis</li> <li>• Learn how to bring materiality and tangibility to government missions and purposes</li> </ul>

## What do we need to keep talking about?

- How do we strengthen the public sector workforce? We've all seen what it is capable of, so we can no longer pretend that we cannot do better than we have in the past.
- Creative collaborations. There's a lot to be done about how governments relate. Whether that's with citizens, or bottom-up initiatives, or each other.
- Who is getting left behind? What are we not seeing? What needs to go?
- How do you share power and create a more open space to talk about what sort of futures can we collectively have and might want?
- How do we make sure that we do not all snap back to how things were? How can we be relentless about holding ourselves to account to this?

## What advice could be given to others undertaking something similar?

- The ability to create meaningful online spaces for honest reflection and sharing is possible though should not be taken for granted and takes careful consideration and work.
- Pay attention to the 'wrap-around', the points of interconnection, whether it be bringing people in and out of the (conceptual) space or moving between learning and reflection time, and include informal spaces (the equivalent of antechambers, green rooms or even bars – spaces for people to be acquainted and to decompress and digest - spaces for spontaneity).
- Events can often focus on 'the what', the 'so what' and the 'now what' – just as with in-person events, the 'now, what' is perhaps the hardest bit for virtual events.

- The Learning Festival was deliberate about being humble and tentative, given the great uncertainty of the crisis, which aided in providing a greater sense of intimacy, candour and generosity than might otherwise happen with such events.
- There is more to be learnt about the enabling techniques for helping people collaborate and connect at a distance.

### Thank you and further information

Thank you to Brenton Caffin, Nicole Barling-Luke and Jesper Christiansen of States of Change for their participation in the Dialogue Session to capture these insights. Further information about the Festival, including the sessions held, can be found at <https://festival.states-of-change.org/>.