



Insights Capture with



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Government After Shock is a collaborative initiative supported by:



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 this ['2020 After Shock Dialogues Network'](#). This will help inform, among other things and events, the discussions at *Government After Shock* on 17-18 November 2020.

It provides an overview of some of the key messages, insights and take-aways from the Creative Bureaucracy Festival, a series of events that took place 28 September – 2 October 2020. This event report has been developed collaboratively between the Creative Bureaucracy Festival and the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation.

A high-level view of the Creative Bureaucracy Festival

The [Creative Bureaucracy Festival](#), which started in 2018, is an annual international forum for government innovation, involving public servants and others interested in how more creativity can be encouraged and enabled in the public sector. It emphasises identifying the unsung heroes in the public sector but also how to address serious topics in playful ways, to bring out the humanness within the administration.

In 2020 the Festival had a completely online format due to social distancing restrictions. The Festival included more than 300 speakers, over 160 sessions, and 2 languages, with 15,000 visitors from 89 countries. 48% of visitors were under 34 years old.

What is the relationship of the Creative Bureaucracy Festival to the crisis?

There was a thematic strand on silver linings of the crisis, including looking at what could be learned from so much of the impossible suddenly being possible and happening at great speed.

What was the focus of the Creative Bureaucracy Festival?

The Festival is driven by the question of how you transform the inner life of the bureaucracy to empower public servants. It sees itself as part of a movement, though one that is still fragmented and lacking stewardship. The three pillars of the Festival in 2020 were:

- **How to embed this promising movement?** How do you move from 'no, because' to 'yes, and'? How to be strategically principled and tactically flexible? How do we keep the best and

reinvest the rest? What are the right incentives for now? How do you prepare the unknown when the classic model of bureaucracy limits the interactions between different areas and specialisations?

- **How can people make the most of their potential?** How do we allow people to apply their untapped discretionary effort in the areas most needed or valuable, but also that brings out the best in them?
- **How do we support having different types of relationships based on mutual respect?** How can different sectors and parts of the system work together founded on public/common good?

What were some of the highlights or points of reflection?

- The necessity of becoming a fully virtual event provided more of a helicopter view than normal of all of the different threads of what is going on in the broader innovation ecosystem.
- Digital allowed for more people from different places to get involved than would normally be the case, including a much larger proportion of younger participants.
- There was a strong interest in the ideas around resilience and also anything that provided personal stories behind change efforts. There was a hunger for the practical elements behind the theories and ideas.
- The leadership paradigm of ‘humble leadership’ was widely referenced and examples are widespread – especially among the most impactful organisations.
- The crisis has helped to accelerate the uptake of the ideas of a creative bureaucracy.
- The crisis has been one of the biggest experiments ever undertaken (e.g. the biggest abrupt reduction in carbon emission reductions). There has been a huge amount of trialling and testing of things never done before, but it is not yet clear what will happen longer term in terms of whether these things will overcome the traditional problem of embedding new practices.
- The crisis revealed the importance of human connection and interaction – by forcing us to jump to 2025 in terms of digitisation, we’ve seen the positives and limitations at great speed.
- There is clarity about what matters but confusion about how to drive/pursue those things that matter.
- Previously there was a shroud over so much of the work of government, but now the role and value of the public sector has been reinforced by the crisis.
- For many, the old normal is an exotic destination – what we had was not something that everyone got to experience equally, and we can do better.

What were some of the key take-aways or messages that you want others to know?

- Creative Bureaucracy Festival is more than just an event; it is an initiative. It is intended to be a port of call for those who are currently frustrated within the bureaucracy and/or need inspiration.
- Too often creativity is hidden from view – we need to celebrate and lift the very human side of the bureaucracy and what it is capable of.
- People are not alone and there is the potential for the public sector to achieve so much more.

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?
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Complacency ● The lack of preparedness and instead really taking resilience seriously ● Thinking that GDP is the only measure of success ● The perception of public servants as administrators rather than creative, entrepreneurially-minded shapers of the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Human connection and interaction at the centre of our work ● The clarity about what <i>really</i> matters – health and society. ● The instinct to take measured risks and experiments to do things better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating enabling environments, and conditions that support people to be playful, to think afresh and to question the existing without throwing it all away ● Identifying what needs to change to suit the contemporary world ● Ensuring the bureaucracy aligns more with people’s lives and experiences.
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What do we need to keep talking about?

- The crisis has shifted the *way* people work. It is not yet clear whether it has shifted the *policy* that people will work with.
- How do we unlock and unpick some of our structures that are no longer doing what we want or need them to without losing the scale, scope and effectiveness of large structures?
- What is government really for? And is it structured in the right way to support that purpose?
- The relationship between politics and policy, and how they support each other (or not).
- Change is possible, we can solve problems, but only if we do things in a different way.
- What is government capable of? We will only be able to get to where we want if people think of government as somewhere they want to work, and it is seen as creative, entrepreneurial and inspiring.

What advice could be given to others undertaking something similar?

- Establishing relationships is hard and takes time.
- You do not have to try and cover/do everything in one event. Look at how different players can complement each other and focus on your core thing/offering to the ecosystem.

Thank you and further information

Thank you to Charles Landry and Robyn Bennett. You can find more detail about the Festival and the sessions at <https://creativebureaucracy.org/festival-2020/programme/>.