



Insights Capture with

RSA



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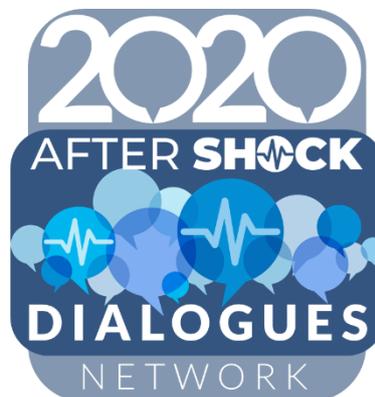
OECD OPSI

Observatory of
Public Sector Innovation

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' <https://oecd-opsi.org/government-after-shock> This will help inform, among other things and events, the discussions at *Government After Shock* on 17-18 November 2020.



This overview has been done in cooperation between RSA and the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation.

A high-level view of the Bridges to the Future series

Bridges to the Future is a multi-faceted initiative that includes RSA research and thinking around some core themes, a week-long convening and dialogue, and an ongoing engagement with RSA's network of fellows as they explore and create change through their work across the globe: "creating a space to pull in the fellows and create a focal point, for the stories and ideas that fellows were working on." It built on a cross-RSA [collaborative exercise launched in March](#). The project's evocative name captures the goal: to create structural, intentional processes to guide work and thinking into the future.

What is the relationship of the event to the crisis?

Bridges to the Future was a direct response to the turmoil generated by Covid-19. As governments and public purpose organisations pivoted quickly to a new operating context and set of citizens' needs, RSA saw a distinct need to make sense of the changes while starting to build a long-term view.

"[It was about] the notion that forced change can be a source of struggle and hardship, but also innovation."

"Crises tend to reveal structural weaknesses within societies and systems."

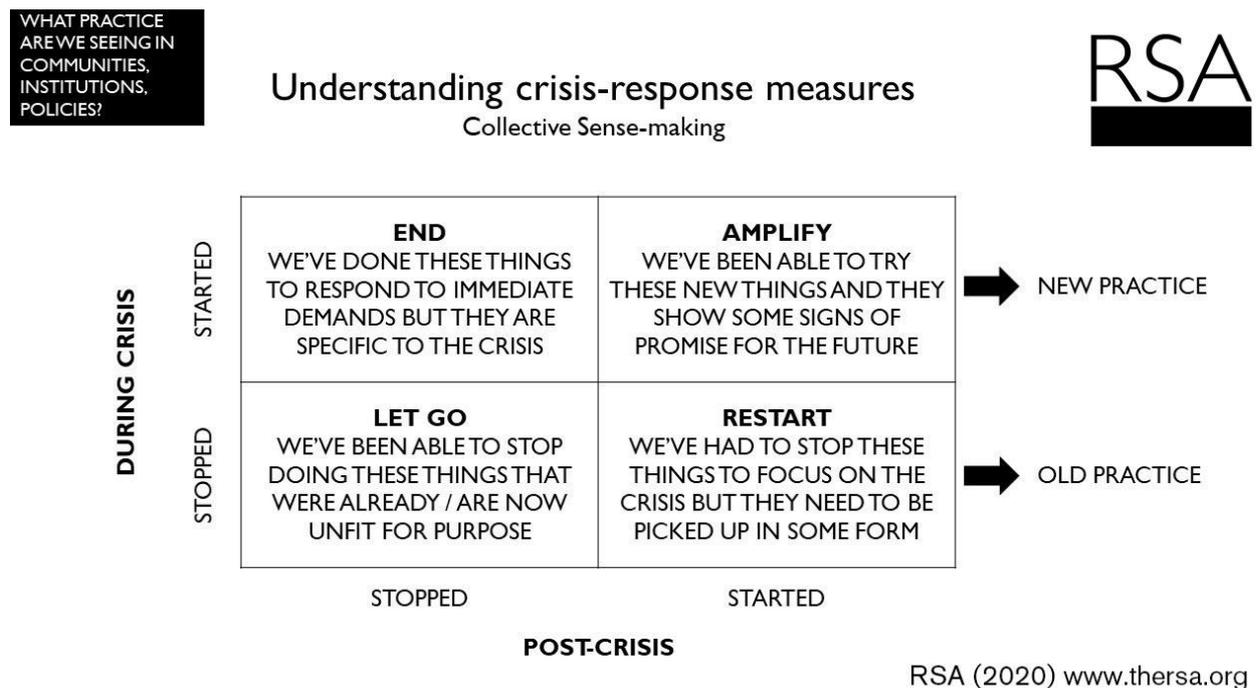
Their framing dovetails perfectly with the thinking behind the Government After Shock project: it combines a critical examination of what governments *have stopped doing, what they have started doing, and what they are doing differently* with a sense of both opportunity and duty to build a better society in the wake of this year’s challenges and lessons.

What was the focus of the event?

The RSA team focused on five thematic areas, with branching conversations for each, and with an underpinning enquiry to tease out the learning around how change happens:

1. A future that protects people and planet
2. Fair Education
3. Stronger economic support for individuals, workers and families
4. Invest in communities at scale
5. People led health, care and local services

Ian Burbidge, Associate Director of the RSA Lab, developed the RSA Future Change framework to connect these conversations around universal themes and actions: during and after crisis, and what interventions we stop, start, and amplify:



What were some of the highlights or points of reflection?

- “What crisis is it [that we’re actually in]?” The team spoke about how the five focal areas kept on collapsing into a more holistic layer that spanned all of them. “[We’re] increasingly seeing the interconnection and interdependence between these different bridges and areas.”
- Themes that resonated across the five focus areas included:
 - racial justice and racial inclusion
 - mental health and wellbeing

- cross-system collaboration, between sectors but also between actors (e.g., workplaces and unions)
- empowerment of staff, teachers, students
- issues of inequality and insecurity (self-employed, gig workers, etc.)
- green recovery and green jobs
- The question of “how we’re showing up in our lives and our workplaces as human beings,” with humanity, vulnerability, and in the era of Covid-19, personal glimpses into our family and private lives.
- That we have to examine “the idea of value:” the team discussed how the Bridges to the Future series highlighted “the things we value, even if we don’t value them in monetary terms”
- “Community is a thing. I haven’t spoken to any groups of people who haven’t mentioned community in one way or another.”
- “The importance of transitions” Ian mentioned how the part of his framework that “tends to get the least attention” is the stuff *we’re letting go of*, mirroring a theme for *Government After Shock* about “creative decommissioning,” as the States of Change team put it, or Ian’s words: “gracefully letting things go.”

“Without gracefully letting go, without mindfully letting go of some activity and some practice, we can’t create the space for the new to emerge.”

What were some of the key take-aways?

- The RSA team described the “ether” of the dialogue having a theme that certain governance paradigms, such as New Public Management and “What Works” approaches with a focus on specific, quantitative measures, have reached their limits. This dovetails with the idea that the right lenses were the holistic ones, where for instance the future for people, educational outcomes, and regenerative environmental approaches were all part of the same conversation.
- Like the States of Change Learning Festival, the parallel #BlackLivesMatter movement weighed heavily on the RSA team and participants. “[There was a] small-p political edge to a lot of the conversations, and I mean that in a positive way.” “A lot of the conversations challenged RSA to rethink a lot of its practices, including #BlackLives Matter” [and led to] “a lot of conversations about the role of government and the ethos of governance.”
- People wanted to find mutually acceptable goals and principles, even if the specific policy approaches might differ. “There was an acknowledgement of a fragmentation in the current system, and a willingness and an interest to... be more attuned to what other people were saying and thinking.”
- This notion of “a great pause” is definitely in people’s thinking, even if they haven’t recognized it; however, many people are still thinking that they’re getting back to business as usual. But the awareness is building. Some people were surprised to think about their “crisis actions,” changes they brought in to respond to the current situation, as potentially being something to learn from, and maybe even keep. “This being an opportunity for learning and development seemed a powerful thing by itself.”

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"> • Seeing social, environmental, and economic outcomes as separate • Unquestioning search for growth – what is the purpose of the economy we’re trying to create? • Command and control structures in workplaces and other hierarchies • The assumption that everything can be fixed, that the task of policymakers is to find the solution and implement it • “The over-centralization of state,” which has been a massive barrier to an effective Covid response (in lieu of a more citizen-centred response) • The lack of any kind of coordinating mechanism between central and local government (UK specific) • The idea that government can’t act in in a big way, e.g., for climate change, as Covid has proved that government can do big bold stuff quickly • The idea that “Some things are too big to experiment with” • Structural unfairnesses that exist within the education system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared humanity with recognition of different contexts • New opportunities for interconnectivity, to learn from each other, etc. • Community connections: “The schools that showed the most resilience were those that had strong relationships with their communities already” • Connections between issues and exploring them not in silos • Optimism that change is possible • This “real sort of energy for activism around human rights” continue • “Being more open and vulnerable and revealing more of ourselves” • “This recognition that we can learn and experiment our way through difficult times” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The things that we value, we have to support them effectively, not just hold them to account... they need encouraging and support, not just monitoring and assessment.” • “What does it look like to realign society around what we actually value?” • “We need to have appropriate investment into communities that need [it]” • “If there’s one thing that a crisis reveals, it’s the health of the system; we had no slack in the system to absorb anything. • Continued need to examine questions of inclusion, breadth of perspectives and viewpoints.

What do we need to keep talking about?

- Purpose and values: “Why don’t we start with a conversation about what people need to live the life they want to live?”
- Connections between social and environmental impacts
- “Revisiting what are the core capacities we need to be developing in people to be able to work with complexity and navigate the sorts of challenges we’re talking about”
- “Long-term thinking... and how it feeds and loops back into medium-term planning, and how that informs your immediate planning horizons. And all of those things require different people and types of leadership... and we’re not good at recognizing that.”
- How we steward loss practically to end well

What advice could be given to others undertaking something similar?

- The team felt like it had both an opportunity and a responsibility to hold space for this kind of dialogue and exploration, but was struggling with the idea that they didn’t know exactly what would become of the work. “There’s always a leap of faith that people will find value [in events like this].”
- You need resources to support really well-designed collaborative processes.

Thank you and further information

Thank you to Ian Burbridge, Mark Londesborough, Rebecca Ford, Riley Thorold, and Josie Warden for their participation in the Dialogue Session to capture these insights. Further information about the event, including the sessions held, can be found at <https://www.thersa.org/bridges-future>.