

# Principles of collaborative group working in equitable co-design projects: mitigating “tragedies of co-design”

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# Responding to the 'dark side' of co-production

- Long seen the value of and utilised participatory methodologies whilst recognising they are not 'magic' (Dudau et al., 2019)
- Highlighted and critiqued tokenistic practice and the co-creation of dis/value
- Sociological analysis: 'dark side' not inherent to the method but often outcome of inadequate/actively hostile structures and systems (which promote poor practice)

But what to do about this?

- Extend dark side critique into finding solutions
- Found potential in work of Elinor Ostrom to both mitigate the co-creation of dis/value and support the co-creation of value

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Health Research Policy and Systems

**COMMENTARY** **Open Access**

**Lost in the shadows: reflections on the dark side of co-production**

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**Abstract**

This article is a response to Oliver et al.'s Commentary 'The dark side of coproduction: do the costs outweigh the benefits for health research?' recently published in *Health Research Policy and Systems* (2019, 17:33). The original commentary raises some important questions about how and when to co-produce health research, including highlighting various professional costs to those involved. However, we identify four related limitations in their inquiry, as follows: (1) the adoption of a problematically expansive definition of co-production that fails to acknowledge key features that distinguish co-production from broader collaboration; (2) a strong focus on technocratic rationales for co-producing research and a relative neglect of democratic rationales; (3) the transposition of legitimate concerns relating to collaboration between researchers and practitioners onto work with patients, service users and marginalised citizens; and (4) the presentation of bad *practice* as an inherent flaw, or indeed 'dark side', of co-production without attending to the corrupting influence of *contextual* factors within academic research that facilitate and even promote such malpractice. The Commentary's limitations can be seen to reflect the contemporary use of the term 'co-production' more broadly. We describe this phenomenon as 'cobiquity' – an apparent appetite for participatory research practice and increased emphasis on partnership working, in combination with the related emergence of a plethora of 'co' words, promoting a conflation of meanings and practices from different collaborative traditions. This phenomenon commonly leads to a misappropriation of the term 'co-production'. Our main motivation is to address this imprecision and the detrimental impact it has on efforts to enable co-production with marginalised and disadvantaged groups. We conclude that Oliver et al. stray too close to 'the problem' of 'co-production' seeing only the dark side rather than what is casting the shadows. We warn against such a restricted view and argue for greater scrutiny of the structural factors that largely explain academia's failure to accommodate and promote the egalitarian and utilitarian potential of co-produced research.

**Keywords:** Co-production, collaboration, participatory research, collaborative research, applied health research, research impact, dark logic, unintended consequences, user involvement, patient and public involvement

Williams, O., Sarre, S., Papoulias, S.C., Knowles, S., Robert, G., Beresford, P., Rose, D., Carr, S., Kaur, M. and Palmer, V.J., 2020. Lost in the shadows: reflections on the dark side of co-production. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 18(1), pp.1-10.

# Eight design principles determined to enable groups to manage common pool resources effectively

1. Clearly defined boundaries
2. Proportional equivalence between benefits and costs
3. Collective-choice arrangements
4. Monitoring
5. Graduated sanctions
6. Conflict resolution mechanisms
7. Minimal recognition of rights to organize
8. For groups that are part of larger social systems, there must be appropriate coordination among relevant groups. Every sphere of activity has an optimal scale



# Testing the principles

- Review of 91 empirical studies accumulated since the original study provides strong empirical support for the efficacy of the core design principles (Cox et al., 2010)

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Cox, M., G. Arnold, and S. Villamayor Tomás. 2010. A review of design principles for community-based natural resource management. *Ecology and Society* 15(4): 38. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol15/iss4/art38/>



*Synthesis*  
**A Review of Design Principles for Community-based Natural Resource Management**

*Michael Cox<sup>1</sup>, Gwen Arnold<sup>1</sup>, and Sergio Villamayor Tomás<sup>1</sup>*

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**ABSTRACT.** In 1990, Elinor Ostrom proposed eight design principles, positing them to characterize robust institutions for managing common-pool resources such as forests or fisheries. Since then, many studies have explicitly or implicitly evaluated these design principles. We analyzed 91 such studies to evaluate the principles empirically and to consider what theoretical issues have arisen since their introduction. We found that the principles are well supported empirically and that several important theoretical issues warrant discussion. We provide a reformulation of the design principles, drawing from commonalities found in the studies.

**Key Words:** *common-pool resources; design principles; diagnostics; institutions*

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1a. User boundaries

1b. Resource boundaries

2a. Congruence with local conditions

2b. Appropriation and provision

3. Collective choice arrangements

4a. Monitoring users

4b. Monitoring the resource

5. Graduated sanctions

6. Conflict resolution mechanisms

7. Minimal recognition of rights to organize

8. Nested enterprises

# Design principles for collaborative group working?

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## Generalizing the core design principles for the efficacy of groups

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### ABSTRACT

This article generalizes a set of core design principles for the efficacy of groups that was originally derived for groups attempting to manage common-pool resources (CPRs) such as irrigation systems, forests, and fisheries. The dominant way of thinking until recently was that commons situations invariably result in the tragedy of overuse, requiring either privatization (when possible) or top-down regulation. Based on a worldwide database of CPR groups, Ostrom proposed a set of principles that broadly captured the essential aspects of the institutional arrangements that succeeded, as contrasted to groups whose efforts failed. These principles can be generalized in two respects: first, by showing how they follow from foundational evolutionary principles; and second, by showing how they apply to a wider range of groups. The generality of the core design principles enables them to be used as a practical guide for improving the efficacy of many kinds of groups.

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- 3 case studies in education & 2 in urban neighbourhoods
- because of their theoretical generality, the principles have wider range of application than CPR groups and are relevant to nearly any situation where people must cooperate and coordinate to achieve shared goals
- although local tailoring is usually required for their implementation

*‘Given such a strong foundation of theoretical and empirical support, the core design principles can potentially serve as a practical guide for increasing the efficacy of groups in real-world settings ... We encourage others to use the principles ... as a practical guide for improving the efficacy of groups, as we are starting to do for schools and neighbourhoods.’ (p11)*

# Can we apply the principles within co-design initiatives in health & social care improvement work (and would they help)?

- value co-creation at group/collective levels is a gap in current QI discussions
- applying the principles could help maintain focus on user centredness in a complex design space
- applying the principles also invites consideration of all agents in a system simultaneously, and about the relational aspects of that system
- legal/monitoring aspects problematic?

# A health systems case study: retrospective application

Research Report

## Co-Design of Services for Health and Reentry (CO-SHARE)

An Experience-Based Co-Design (EBCD) Pilot Study with Individuals Returning to Community from Jail and Service Providers in Los Angeles County

Peter Mendel, Lois M. Davis, Susan Turner, Gabriela Armenta, Cedric Farmer, Cheryl Branch, Glenn Robert



Mendel P, Davis LM, Turner S et al. (2019). 'Co-Design of Services for Health and Reentry (CO-SHARE). An Experience-Based Co-Design (EBCD) Pilot Study with Returning Citizens and Service Providers in Los Angeles County'. RAND Health Care Program

## Applying Elinor Ostrom's Design Principles to Guide Co-Design in Health(care) Improvement: A Case Study with Citizens Returning to the Community from Jail in Los Angeles County



RESEARCH AND THEORY

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Increased interest in collaborative and inclusive approaches to healthcare improvement makes revisiting Elinor Ostrom's 'design principles' for enabling collective management of common pool resources (CPR) in polycentric systems a timely endeavour.

**Theory and method:** Ostrom proposed a generalisable set of eight core design principles for the efficacy of groups. To consider the utility of Ostrom's principles for the planning, delivery, and evaluation of future health(care) improvement we retrospectively apply them to a recent co-design project.

**Results:** Three distinct aspects of co-design were identified through consideration of the principles. These related to: (1) understanding and mapping the system (2) upholding democratic values and (3) regulating participation. Within these aspects four of Ostrom's eight principles were inherently observed. Consideration of the remaining four principles could have enhanced the systemic impact of the co-design process.

**Discussion:** Reconceptualising co-design through the lens of CPR offers new insights into the successful system-wide application of such approaches for the purpose of health(care) improvement.

**Conclusion:** The eight design principles – and the relationships between them – form a heuristic that can support the planning, delivery, and evaluation of future healthcare improvement projects adopting co-design. They may help to address questions of how to scale up and embed such approaches as self-sustaining in wider systems.

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KEYWORDS:  
co-design; common pool resources; co-production; healthcare improvement; case study; quality improvement

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Robert, G., Williams, O., Lindenfalk, B., Mendel, P., Davis, L.M., Turner, S., Farmer, C. and Branch, C., 2021. Applying Elinor Ostrom's design principles to guide co-design in health (care) improvement: A case study with citizens returning to the community from jail in Los Angeles county. *International Journal of Integrated Care*, 21(1).

# Findings

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- three distinct aspects of co-design were identified through consideration of the principles:
  - 1. understanding and mapping the system**
    - clearly defined boundaries (principle 1); optimal scale and appropriate coordination among relevant groups (principle 8)
  - 2. upholding democratic values**
    - proportional equivalence between benefits and costs (Principle 2); collective-choice arrangements (Principle 3)
  - 3. regulating participation**
    - monitoring (Principle 4); graduated sanctions (Principle 5); conflict resolution mechanisms (Principle 6); and minimal recognition of rights to organize (Principle 7)
- within these aspects four of Ostrom's eight principles were inherently observed (principles 1, 2, 3 and 8)
- consideration of the remaining four principles could have enhanced the systemic impact of the co-design process (principles 4, 5, 6, and 7)
- the design principles - and relationships between them - form a heuristic that could support the planning, delivery, and evaluation of future healthcare system-level co-design projects



# Promotion of prospective application

To facilitate translation of theory into practice, we develop Ostrom's work by proposing:

- an original, systemically-informed re-classification of Ostrom's principles (see diagram in next slide)
- that co-creation endeavours can be reconceptualised as a novel way of creating a 'common pool resource'
- that failure to adequately address the potential to co-create dis/value can lead to 'tragedies of co-design'

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## New development: Mitigating and negotiating the co-creation of dis/value—Elinor Ostrom's design principles and co-creating public value

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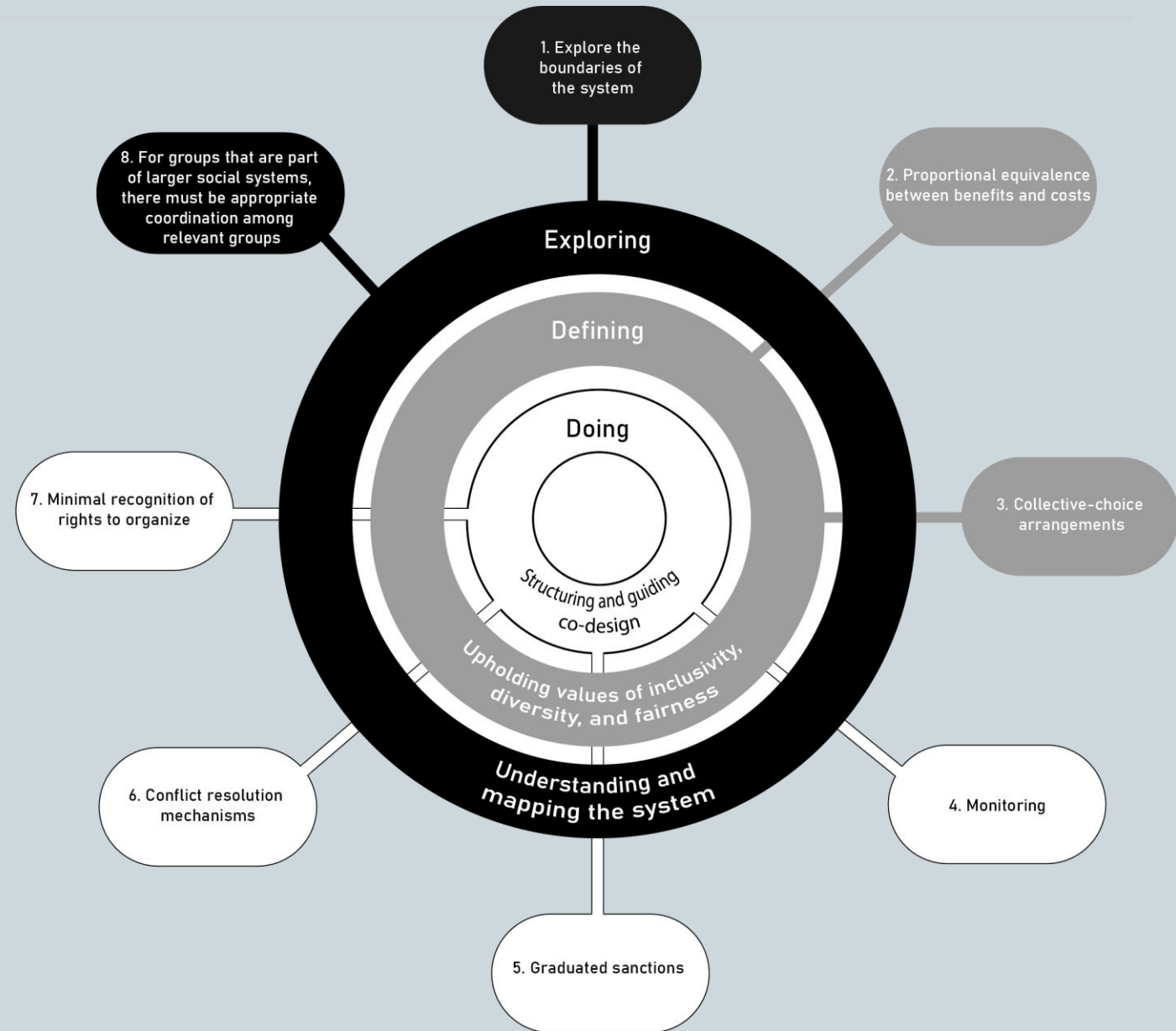
**IMPACT**  
This article provides a way to promote more effective and equitable collaboration in the design and delivery of public services. Increasingly public services are designed with service users, but it is common for these provider–user endeavours to perform sub-optimally and/or to have negative outcomes. The authors offer a set of principles and a novel framework for applying them that have been designed to: firstly, mitigate the potential for sub-optimal and/or negative performance and, secondly, promote more positive processes and outcomes for provider–user collaborations. Improving provider–user collaboration in this way will ultimately lead to better design and delivery of public services.

**KEYWORDS**  
Collaborative group working; co-creation; co-design; common pool resources; dark side; dis/value; Elinor Ostrom; systemic public value

**ABSTRACT**  
Although Elinor Ostrom's principles for collaborative group working could promote effective and equitable collaborative endeavours among diverse actors/stakeholders, they are largely untested in public service design and delivery. This article demonstrates how Ostrom's principles could help to mitigate the potential for co-creating dis/value and instead support all involved to co-create systemic public value. The authors develop Ostrom's work by proposing: an original, systemically-informed re-classification of Ostrom's principles; that co-creation endeavours can be reconceptualized as a novel way of creating a 'common pool resource' and; that failure to adequately address the potential to co-create dis/value can lead to 'tragedies of co-design'.

# A new way of visualising the design principles

- We used systemic principles to re-classify Ostrom's principles into 3 distinct aspects of co-design
- This illustrates the relationships between the principles and what functions they serve within collaborative endeavours
- This helps to anchor the principles in the practical tasks of co-creating which is useful as they can otherwise appear abstract

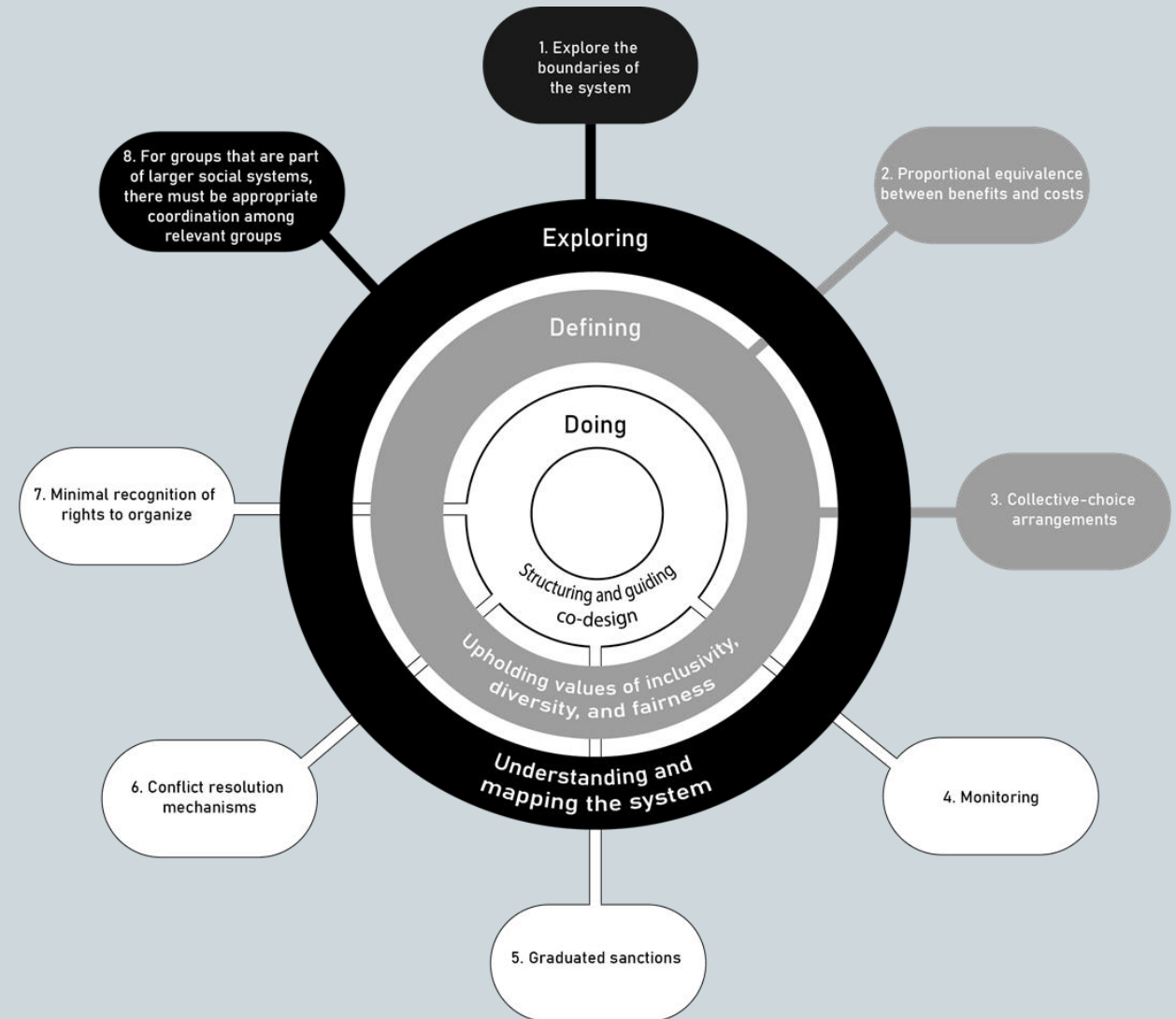


# A heuristic (but no panacea) to promote the co-creation of value and both mitigate and manage the co-creation of disvalue

## IN THEORY

Using the design principles supports achievement of both technocratic and moral rationales for co-creation by:

- providing a systemic and systematic approach to planning, delivering, and evaluating the co-creation of public value
- making explicit issues of equity relating to involvement and participation
- explicitly addressing the potential to co-create dis/value and offering a means through which to negotiate unintentionally co-created dis/value



# A heuristic (but no panacea) to promote the co-creation of value and both mitigate and manage the co-creation of disvalue

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## IN PRACTICE

The design principles can help groups to:

- Identify who needs to be involved in any given co-creation process, including highlighting those who are missing/excluded (**Principles 1 and 8**)
- Recognize the uniqueness and importance of each actor's/stakeholder's contribution (**Principles 1, 2 and 8**)
- Acknowledge that power is unequally distributed throughout systems and that this can/will inform the 'doing' of co-creation (**Principles 2, 3 and 7**)
- Identify and address exploitative participation and negotiate interpersonal tensions (**Principles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7**)
- Recognize how the contributions of each actor/stakeholder, and collaborations between them, relate to the overall aim of service (re-)design/improvement (**Principles 1, 2 and 8**)
- Develop a sense of collective identity and action and address issues of sustainability by promoting long-term planning and equitable approaches to co-creating and managing value (**Principles 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8**)

# Next steps

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- Real potential in prospectively applying and evaluating the design principles in a diverse range of collaborative/participatory contexts
- May help to address questions of how to scale up and embed such approaches as self-sustaining in wider systems
- Mitigate and manage the co-creation/co-production of dis/value ('tragedies of co-design')
- Funding secured for:
  - 16-month prospective pilot study working with 'Shaping Our Lives'
  - 3-year PhD studentship to continue work with 'Shaping Our Lives'
- Currently conducting citation review to identify/analyse previous prospective applications of Ostrom's design principles
- Currently in process of developing resources to make design principles more 'user-friendly' to facilitate their use in practice – PLEASE HELP US!

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