

Community Engagement

Assignment 2

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Introduction

This report is a reflective writing report on how to coordinate an effective community engagement programme based on the the Assessment 1 report. The Assessment 1 report had looked at the community from the London Borough of Merton and it had intended to address the rise of criminality among youngsters problem. It was an educational program that intended to help the community and especially the young generation to focus on various activities such as sport and arts in order to stay out of street and enter in dangerous gangs and commit juvenile infractions.

Kolb's reflective model

In order to have an effective reflection it will be applied Kolb's reflective model. Kolb (1984) states that the experiential learning can be evaluated in stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.

Concrete experience refers to the learning experience that I had as a student for the Community Engagement module by undertaking the role of the practitioner for the local authority. Coordinating a community program involves knowledge and expertise in ensuring efficient community mapping process as base of the program.

The reflective observation stage involves a more deeply evaluation of the learning experience, what was wrong, what was good. The project that has been introduced for the assessment 1 had used the community mapping to analyse the characteristics and needs of the community. Based on the community mapping it has been decided to focus on the young generation segment because it has been observed that there is a lack of youth centres and other educational places for children over 10 years old after they start secondary school. The good part of the program is that it followed the specific structure for strategic planning by looking at aims and objectives with short term and long term goals, describing the purpose, establishing the timeline, evaluating the role of the main stakeholders, establishing roles within the team, management and control mechanism, data collection and communication of the program to the stakeholders.

Abstract conceptualisation stage of the reflection looks at how things would have been done differently, how it could have been improved. Community engagement is defined as "the active participation of local residents and community groups in the decisions that affect their lives. Communities can mean different things to different people. For those who carry responsibility for public services, engaging with the community means ensuring that everyone in their local area is

given the opportunity to comment on the services provided for them and on the organisation's priorities" (London Councils, 2008).

The community engagement is beneficial because it helps with the development of the area on different levels. The progression of the area will help the local business, the local residents and other agencies involved. The community engagement can be realised by finding solutions to address the problems and the needs of the community and to manage the community expectations. It helps with creating a structure to help the community and to coordinate proposed programs. The community engagement will increase the satisfaction levels and will create a sense of ownership for the communities to have a concrete input for helping with the progress of their own neighbourhoods. It involves great number of resources such as time or money and complex preparation and capabilities as a practitioner to promote the greater community involvement.

The best practices for community engagement should take in consideration the most effective design for the program to help the community and address their needs. To encourage and enable all the selected segments to get involved. Another focus should be on building trust among the community members, local groups and service providers, local council. The community engagement should create the opportunity to influence that will affect the local people and groups from the community. One of the most important part of the community engagement is the knowledge of the problems of the community. For this purpose the project developed for Assessment 1 is focusing on communication within the community in regards with the purpose of the project, with the objectives and aims of the project, with the short term objectives and long term objectives of creating the new youth centre. The continuous collaboration with the community would be realised through social media platforms and through the council website. The collaboration with the local schools will be two sided and schools will inform the project manager if the children show interest and want to get involved in the project even from incipient stages. Social media nowadays is the most important way to reach communities because of the technological development and the internet becoming a commodity. An important principle is to remove any potential barriers for the program in order to ensure its effectiveness. By removing physical, language or social barriers will ensure the communities are getting access to information or voicing needs or opinions. Understanding the community is essential the complexity of the needs, the characteristics and the emphasis of achieving the targeted results.

By reflecting at the program coordinated in the role of the local authority practitioner it is considered that the best best practices for community engagement techniques related to timeline, partnering with relevant parties and entities, ensuring effective and appropriate communication for

the selected segment of the community. It is important to maintain a simple approach to communicate at all levels of the community and to make it accessible for the community to understand the program and to get involved. When the members of the community are getting involved, assets and resources are gathered and that benefits the growth of the community.

A good practice for the presented community engagement program was to look at the stakeholder who are involved in the program. The program benefited the community which is the main stakeholder, but also the local council, the local schools. By establishing the roles within the team it has been taken the community also. The roles can vary during the project because is a long term project, the local council will have the main role in the project and will have to be informed at all times. The program involves the skills and knowledge of a team member who will be in charge of the digitalisation of the project. The project will be communicated to the local authority and it will be communicated to the public. The methods of communication used will be accordingly, formal and official communications, but also on social media and the council website.

As a practitioner is important not to communicate only with parts of the community that agree with personal views. That is why consultation is important for the community, but also for the local authorities and agencies. Attending the meetings should take in consideration the work program of the residents, their availability.

Communication techniques can be divided into the direct and indirect. Direct method means face-to-face, letters, email or telephone conversations with individuals. Indirect methods could include leaflets, advertising, radio programmes, articles in newspapers and press reports. These are indirect because they do not involve any direct contact between the person giving the message and the person receiving it.

I consider that a better practice for the youth centre program would have been the organisation of the "Open Space" meetings in order to allow the community members to create their own agenda and discussions in a less formal setting than a public meeting. This technique assumes that people write down or suggest issues at the start of the meeting and then form smaller groups with people of similar concerns, to talk about the opportunities and way forward. Participants are given the opportunity to move between discussion groups and take part in as many or as few as they feel comfortable with. The open space meeting can be realised by following the next steps: sending an open invitation to the community, that explains the purpose of the meeting, arranging the meeting chairs into a circle, providing a bulletin board for participants to raise issues and offer suggestions. The outcomes from the meeting can then be collated and fed back to the whole group (Ground Work, 2018).

The youth centre program has taken into consideration the two-way flow of information between the project group and the wider community because it is essential for the program because is a long term program. This program is intending to gain the trust of the young members of community to consider the centre a place where they can develop , they can find comfort and support for their problems. Building trusting relationships with the young members of the community involves building trusting relationships with their parents and careers and therefore it involves a great part of the community and that contributes to strengthening the community.

Inclusive community engagement recognises that “everyone has a role to play in public engagement. It provides people with opportunities to participate by reducing barriers, creating connections and engaging in meaningful and supportive ways” (Iap2content, 2020). The youth centre program should take in consideration the inclusive community engagement and to ensure that all members of the community within the age interval segment has access to the information and feels welcomed to the youth centre.

The last stage of the reflection is the active experimentation stage which plans how the individual put in practice the acquired theoretical knowledge. The experiences within the active experimentation stage become the new “concrete experiences” and then the learning cycle restarts. I consider that this knowledge will help me coordinate community programs and will help me with the decision making for understanding the community, identifying the needs, selecting a relevant need and developing a program and creating a strategic plan whilst ensuring effective communication with the stakeholders at all times.

Conclusion

This reflection had discussed the main concepts from community engagement module by reporting to the youth centre program developed in the role of the local practitioner. It made use of Kolb’s reflective model and had provided detailed personal reflection by following the stages from the model.

It can be concluded that community engagement benefits the community as a whole and helps its development and growth. Community engagement has great importance for the local players, agencies business and for the residents.

This reflection has helped me have a better understanding of the concepts and on the methods used to develop and coordinate a community program. It had helped me reflect on the program I coordinated I the role of the community practitioner and it had made me aware of how important is to engage the community.

References

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