Angela Aristidou-Ritter

Innovation in healthcare through cross-sector collaboration

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SPEAKERS

Vaughn Tan, Angela Aristidou-Ritter, Theme music

Vaughn Tan 00:03
Hello and welcome to Mind Shift, a podcast about innovation from UCL School of Management.

Vaughn Tan 00:09
I'm Vaughn Tan, an innovation and strategy researcher focusing on how organisations can flourish and adapt in times of great uncertainty.

Vaughn Tan 00:16
In each episode, I'll speak to one of my colleagues from the diverse community here at the School of Management, and will look through the lens of their research to get insight into the rapidly shifting world of business today.

Vaughn Tan 00:28
I'm here today with Angela Aristidou-Ritter who is an Assistant Professor at UCL School of Management in our Strategy and Entrepreneurship Group. Angela's research explores how innovations can be found when different sectors come together and she currently focuses on applying these insights to healthcare, which is an industry of particular importance right now. Angela's work is funded by UKRI Future Leader Fellowship and Angela has also received a Fulbright Award, a BT fellowship and funding from the NASA Biomedical Research Institute.

Vaughn Tan 00:56
Angela, before we go deep into the research that you're doing, which I think is fascinating, can you tell us a little bit about yourself, an overview of your research interests, and especially how you got to be interested in those specific areas,

Angela Aristidou-Ritter 01:08

I have a long-standing interest in innovation. And by innovation, I not only mean technology, which of course is a big part of it, but also new ways of working within organisations. I've had this long-term interest even before I was an academic, I had worked for the NASA Biomedical Research Institute where we designed virtual simulations to train astronauts in conflict management. I had worked for the Harvard MIT Center for Medical Innovation for a while. And through those different jobs, I always felt that I wanted to go deeper and understand more. My research has since centered on these interests around technology, innovation and organisations through different ways, in different approaches and methodological approaches as well. But always around those same three interests.

Vaughn Tan 02:04
Very cool. I think the thing which I'm particularly interested in, which we're going to talk about today, is your work on cross sector innovation. So can you just say a little bit about what cross sector means in this context, and also maybe about what kinds of sectors you're particularly interested in the crossing of?

Angela Aristidou-Ritter 02:22
Innovations that I'm interested in are those that emerge when public organisations come together with third sector organisations, such as charities, non-governmental and voluntary organisations, to deliver services. In that sense, they are cross sector, because you're crossing between public and third sector organisations. In particular, I'm interested in innovations that revolve around new ways of working together. These are very important innovations. And I want to say that, as far as I know, and as far as I can see, they are just now coming into being in the more institutionalised way. So yes, there has always been some sort of collaboration between the public sector and the third sector but what we see now very prominently is that governments are pursuing these collaborations, encouraging them, funding them, nurturing them and the hope is that through the innovations across sectors, we will be able to do more than each of the sectors could do alone.

Vaughn Tan 03:31
Fantastic. And I know that you are very interested in and have been for a long time, in the healthcare sector, specifically and in the UK, obviously, healthcare is a huge public sector. Can you tell us a bit about why you think your research is especially relevant right now?

03:46
I'm fascinated with researching the healthcare industry, because I feel that my work can have more impact there, or a more prominent impact there. Because health care is an industry that we are all affected by, from cradle to grave, every single one of us will, at some point, or multiple points, interact with healthcare services, use health care services need health care services. And the healthcare industry, of course, in itself, is a multi billion pound industry, there's no doubt about that. So when I look at health care, I also see it as a professional setting, in which we have the opportunity to look at dynamics that might be relevant in other professional settings, such as law, for example, in that sense, what we experience in healthcare is valuable in itself and what we learn from healthcare is valuable in itself, but also valuable for other industries. For all these reasons, I feel that the work I'm doing there is valuable.

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Vaughn Tan 04:47

Yeah, and I think one of the things that we're seeing, especially in the last, I would say 18 months, is that it's been especially important that the healthcare sector as a whole is able to innovate and adapt quickly when conditions change unexpectedly, right? So we've been in a Coronavirus crisis worldwide for almost two years. At this point, would you say that your interest in figuring out how cross sector collaboration contributes to innovation is something which is given an especially sharp edge by the situation that we're in at the moment?

05:18

Absolutely. Vaughn, I am very glad you brought that up. When I started the current program of study that I'm leading, in my role as a fellow for the UK Research Innovation, I did not expect, of course, like none of us did that COVID would come along. But what I have seen is that organisations across sectors, the public sector and the third sector have come together, and they have created innovative services, to be able to help the populations in the UK and in Canada, to see them through the crisis. Now, what I have observed in the research settings that I'm involved in, is that they have done so in a very organic way. There was no centralised system for coordinating these responses, it was grassroots one would say. What is even more fascinating is that now, two years on, I have observed that some of those innovations are lingering on, they have become established and one might say that they are also spreading across the system, which is absolutely fascinating.

Vaughn Tan 06:25

Yeah, you might see that they're becoming institutionalised, right? Like they're becoming part of the norm of how people in the sector might treat stuff.

Theme music 06:32

Vaughn Tan 06:41

So I think I want to move us now to sort of talk in detail about the research that you're doing. And just to kind of set the context for it, like we're thinking about cross sector innovation, in, well cross sector collaboration, in healthcare where the public sector is, in some way, working with third sector organisations, like charities, NGOs and other voluntary organisations. Can you tell us what you think the mechanisms are, by which these cross sector collaborations create value?

07:15

Worldwide, the population who are the consumers of health services in some sense have come to expect more of services over the last few years, they have come to expect timely, accessible care that is available to them in a time and space of their choosing. For them, there is great value in getting that type of care. Now, there is only so much that the public sector can provide in that direction. So the cross sector collaboration in itself is a mechanism for providing and creating this value for the populations that they serve. There is also a second angle to this, which is that, traditionally, there have been sub pockets of populations that are not served very easily, whether they're less accessible, whether they're more resistant to being accessed by public services. And those populations are more easily reached through third sector organisations, charities, NGOs and nonprofits. So through cross

sector collaborations, the care that these populations receive is very important, and one might say, perhaps the best care that they could possibly receive.

Vaughn Tan 08:30
I think that makes a lot of sense, so where we can think about these third sector organisations as being in a way a kind of a complimentary resource to the public sectors resources, both in terms of the provision of care itself, and also in terms of reaching specific, usually underserved populations, which where I think we're definitely seeing that now with vaccination resistance in various countries. And maybe that's an area in which cross sector collaboration could lead to some better outcomes, not only at the individual level, but also socially, right?

09:03
And I would go a step beyond that - they're not just complementing the public sector provision, in themselves, they add value, because they work differently. Their approach to the community is different. First of all, they don't consider people as patients, they see them as community members, whether they're patients or not, that's incidental. So their way of looking at the world and of approaching the population is different, and therefore it adds value in itself.

Vaughn Tan 09:33
That's fantastic, and I think that this leads to another question, which was top of my mind when I was thinking about your work. So given that they approach the ultimate recipients of health care in a different way, and they also complement public sector resources, can you say a little bit about why you think cross sector collaboration is able to promote innovation in the delivery of healthcare?

09:56
Every time you have organisations approaching the same problem through different mindsets, different frames, different reference points, and those are forced to work together, you get a mesh of practices, of processes, of ideas. This is what I see happening in cross sector collaborations. They come up with ideas that they wouldn't have been able to come up alone or haven't traditionally been able to come up with alone. They question their existing practices, they ask, why are we doing things in this way? And maybe we can combine what we're doing with what they're doing? It's not just a matter of resources, it's a matter of changing one's thinking. And that in itself is an innovative way of working.

Vaughn Tan 10:41
Absolutely, I completely agree that mindsets and changing mindsets or having different mindsets interact with each other is a very fruitful source of doing new things, possibly in better ways. Can you give us some concrete examples from the work that you've done have an instance in which this has happened?

10:59
On a large scale in the research side in Canada, which is led by one of my team members, Dr. Andrew Sarta, in collaboration with professors from the University of Toronto, what we have seen is that the government has decided to promote cross sector collaborations in a region of Canada, which is the size of the UK, arguably, in Ontario, the government has required that providers, organisations across

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sectors public, private and third sector, come together to work together to provide care for local populations, including sometimes underrepresented local populations. And they have made that requirement through providing specific earmarked funding for that requirement. So in that way, organisations have come together and they have created mega teams, teams of five or more organisations that are now working together to provide joint care. It is a spectacular setting for research, and also in very important ways, it shows us what is possible to be done when different organisations from different sectors come together. The access that they have, and the way that they approach problems is very different. That is on a large scale. On a more minor scale or smaller scale. What we have seen in the UK, in one part of the UK, at least where I have been doing research in the last year and a half in Cambridge, is that there has been a great number of collaborations coming up from grassroots organisations where people come together and work together. And those are centered around providing continuous mental health care and support during the pandemic, which has been a great issue for many people - the access to support and mental health care during the pandemic. Especially for segments of the population that are older or perhaps had pre-existing problems or their circumstances changed suddenly during the pandemic. So what we've seen there is that one of those collaborations has come to the point where now it's mature enough, it's established enough, it has won a national level award, and hopes are that it will be disseminated across the UK in the coming year. That is a collaboration that brings together charities together with a trust, which is the UK way of saying "a public provider of health care" and in that collaboration, they are able to provide access to mental health services around the clock for the population locally, which is a fantastic innovation, if you consider that most public services can only provide access to mental health care from nine to five, during work hours.

Vaughn Tan 13:57
Can you tell us who's leading on the research on that project?

14:01
That would be the amazing Dr. Lei Liu, who is my collaborator and part of my research team. She's a network scholar and brings a very interesting perspective to this study, which I did not have.

Vaughn Tan 14:13
That's Lei from UCL right, before?

14:17
Yes, she is. Yes, she is. I was very fortunate to be able to retain her.

Vaughn Tan 14:21
One of our own.

Theme music 14:27

Vaughn Tan 14:31

Right, very cool. I think that's really interesting, Angela. So what you're really describing is basically public sector organisations like an NHS Trust, which is a regional healthcare provider in the public sector, working together with potentially a huge range of third sector organisations to be able to provide healthcare in ways that was previously, simply not possible either because of resource limitations or because the public sector service provider did not have the kind of reach or have the kind of reach to the right kind of people to be able to provide it. And that kind of innovation certainly seems like something which in health care is especially important, both for things like mental health as well as other diseases and illnesses. Do you think healthcare is a sector in which cross sector collaborations are particularly important?

15:25
I do think so, Vaughn. I think that healthcare is an industry in which if this way of delivering care becomes established, and we find ways to make it work, for all partners involved, it could yield immense benefits, not only for the organisations themselves, but for the population and society at large. At the end of the day, health care sustainability and continuity of care are social challenges that affect all of us. What is also important here to highlight is that healthcare is a very sensitive sector. I think that the fact that these changes are happening in health care, show exactly how much they are needed, because otherwise health care is, especially the public sector in healthcare, is resistant to change in many ways.

Vaughn Tan 16:18
I've done some work in healthcare, but maybe some of the listeners may not have done as much work. I wanted you to just maybe say a little bit more to unpack what you mean by healthcare sustainability, healthcare continuity, and I think another one which you didn't mention, but healthcare coverage of population, why are these things that are individually and also socially important?

16:37
Healthcare sustainability, let's take that first, because it's a it's a bit of a loaded concept. So for me healthcare sustainability at a very basic level refers to the fact that we need to be able as society to provide sustainable, long term, reliable health care to our populations. Now, building on that, how do cross sector collaboration support healthcare sustainability? So far, governments have more or less being increasing the amount of money that they offer to support health care provision, in response to increasing populations, increasing populations with comorbidities, different diseases at the same time, and an increasing number of older people in our societies, that is not sustainable over time. One alternative that has been proposed over the last couple of decades is to partner up with different sectors. And the first obvious partner was the public sector with the private sector. Now those public-private partnerships are very interesting, because what they have taught us is that there's more to making a partnership work than just mutual interests. Those partnerships would often cease to exist for various reasons but most notably, because they were pursuing different values over time, they have different values over time, for example, profit over public interest. Hence, governments have turned their interest, now recently to the third sector. The third sector shares the values of the public sector in that respect. Now, the second point you mentioned is health care continuity. Health care continuity refers to the ability to be able to continue your care as a patient, regardless of whether you are in the public sector or the third sector or the private sector. You would like ideally, to be able to move

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smoothly across the different organisations that cater to your better care, wherever those may be based. Now, that is a grand ambition, it is very difficult to achieve that and if those organisations see themselves as silos, they see themselves as independent organisations and not part of the system, it becomes even more difficult because the responsibility falls on the patient, to get them together, get them talking to each other, transfer their information from one organisation to the other, in particular, in the light of all recent regulations around information governance that have been becoming more and more strict over the years, that was almost like a full time job for some patients, especially if they had serious illnesses or multiple illnesses. So bringing them together in close institutionalised structured cross sector partnerships means that all that work is taken out of the hands of the patient and they or families and becomes part of how things are done. In itself that is very important.

Vaughn Tan 20:06
Why is it so important that care is continuous?

20:10
Because when care is discontinuous, we observe escalations of problems that were almost solved. We observe that things are missed between moves from one organisation to the other, we observe, even worse, people dropping out of the system altogether and then re-emerging a few months, a few weeks or a few years later with problems that could have been solved with very few resources if they had been established early on. For young people in particular, which is one of my the populations that I'm interested in, if cares, discontinuous, it can have a long term effect on their personal life and on their work life and their productivity.

Vaughn Tan 20:54
One thing which I wanted to ask you about, as well as this idea, which you've already raised, which is that through cross sector, collaboration, healthcare services, can reach populations and constituencies that previously were not reached. And this is something which I think about a little bit, which is coverage, right, service coverage, is also connected to continuity and sustainability. Because if they're underserved or unreached populations they are less likely to have continuous care and then when they do get to the point where things are serious enough to come into whatever health care delivery system, it is that they managed to get into, it's much more expensive, and the outcomes are not as good. So can you tell us a little bit about how you see healthcare coverage? Like why is it so important that it be dealt with in the context of the other two principles?

21:38
I'll give you an example for that, actually. So in one of the cross sector collaborations that I have studied in the past, which was based in Oxford, they collaborated with a third sector organisation to reach younger populations between the ages of five and 20, I would say, who were facing early mental health issues or concerns around their mental health broadly and well being. So what was the great value of that collaboration was that because the third sector was involved, they were able to take the stigma away from young people accessing care early on. So if you were to ask a teenager to appear in a public sector trust setting to receive mental health support, they would likely not be favourable to that. And there are multiple, multiple studies that suggest that it's not just me. But young people would welcome input from charity or other workers who would reach out to them in the community. So the

meeting would not take place in an institutional setting. But the meeting would take place instead in a community centre or even a cafe, or even their homes. In that sense, they were able to create a connection and a working relationship early on, with young people facing well-being concerns, and did not allow those to escalate over time, to the degree that that young person would require the involvement of a trained professional, such as a psychiatrist. If you think about it in terms of resources, what they did was that they allowed young people to access small amounts of care and input from people who were closer to them and their community and thus lowered the barrier to access care.

Vaughn Tan 23:36
Yeah. And I imagine that what you're seeing, which is what you're describing is increased uptake, right, because the barrier to uptake is lower, and therefore also significantly improved outcomes in the sense that you don't see them presenting with more serious instances of whatever it is in the expensive system for acute care that shows up later on. That is super interesting. And I think that this leads to another question, which was in my mind when I'm thinking about your your work, which is, who ends up, in your opinion, benefiting the most from these cross sector collaborations? It sounds like certainly underserved populations, who are now served, they benefit a lot, but can you tell us about whether the other stakeholders in the healthcare delivery system also benefit and in what way do they benefit?

24:20
Since this is a new phenomenon, the verdict is still out. I will be very frank about that. It is part of my study to understand whether there is a provider impact from these cross sector collaborations. So what I can say is that there is a strong indication that the people working in the organisations enjoy more working in cross sector collaborations because they feel that this way serves their patients best. This has come across in all of our research settings more or less. Another stakeholder that benefits of course is this system as a whole, the more we remove barriers to collaboration across the system, the more robust the system becomes. And robust systems is what makes healthcare sustainable in the long term, not organisations that are individually strong and efficient, but the fact that patients are not contained within an organisation, therefore, we need to have robust healthcare systems to cater for our populations. So that would be a second stakeholder.

Vaughn Tan 25:29
Do you think that the third sector organisations also benefit in some way from this?

25:33
There are ways in which they benefit that have come up and have been highlighted to us by them themselves, one of the ways that they benefit is to get access to a system that would otherwise see them as outsiders. This is very important and should not be underestimated - Third sector organisations often, they don't have the numbers or the size to be able to access resources and funding and spaces that are required for them to do the best that they can do. Through collaborating with public sector organisations, that is one avenue for them to achieve that. A second way in which our research participants have highlighted to us benefits them is that they acquire a better understanding of how the public sector system works. They enjoy understanding and learning more about the ways in which public sector organisations navigate, and that knowledge stays with them even after the collaboration might expire in the future. Some of them also individually report that they learn new ways of

approaching patients of safeguarding of information governance, it is an opportunity for them to assess which practices they want to keep and which practices they want to abandon within their own charity.

Vaughn Tan 27:05
And it also sounds although it's in the background a little bit, there's a significant legitimacy advantage as well, right? If you're a small organisation, and you're partnered with a large public sector organization, that's probably also helpful for the organisation in its existence outside of the specific service that is providing through that collaboration. It's sounds a lot like it might be a Pareto Improvement, like no one is worse off, and everyone is better off from doing these cross sector collaborations, right?

27:31
I'd like to be a bit cautious about that.

Vaughn Tan 27:33
Of course!

Angela Aristidou-Ritter 27:34
Going back to the point you made about legitimacy, there is also a concern that the third sector has always been the voice of the underdog, the underrepresented populations. And the concern is now we are merging together with the public sector, are we still able to be that independent, autonomous, loud voice? Will we be able to maintain that in the long term? And once the collaboration is dissolved, because these collaborations are time limited and we go back to being a self standing alone organisation, what will that future look like for us? Those are concerns that have been voiced. And we don't have answers to that right now, but I do hope that we will in the future.

Theme music 28:18

Vaughn Tan 28:28
I wanted to move now to thinking about the ramifications of your work, both in the healthcare industry and outside the healthcare industry. So could we maybe just start talking about how you see these insights about cross sector collaboration between the public and the third sector, working in applications outside of healthcare?

28:46
The most prominent transfer would be to any other human service setting. And by that I mean social care and education. When it comes to social care. In the UK, there have been movements in that direction, because social care is often linked in with health care. When it comes to education there have been experimental settings within the UK in which this has been pursued. I'm not studying those, but I am keeping a keen eye on them because I am interested in seeing whether they are observing the same mechanisms and findings that I am seeing in healthcare.

Vaughn Tan 29:26

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Fantastic. And then just thinking, you know, now, very practically, if you were a public sector organisation, or if you were a regulator or a government agency that was thinking about creating the kinds of regulations or policies that would encourage cross sector collaboration, like what should you do and what should you avoid doing if you're trying to encourage innovative delivery of human related services by the public sector?

29:52
I would say the number one thing is to let 1000 flowers bloom. The reality is that we do not know which ones are going to stick in which ones are not going to be sustainable over time. Therefore, experimentation is very important. And to allow people the permission to experiment is in itself very important. You should encourage people in the direction of taking a bit of a risk, approaching other organisations and individuals in a charity and trying to create those links, giving them time and space and the opportunity to create those connections. The number one thing to avoid, which has come up in the past is to assume that once the financial arrangement is agreed upon, and once the documents are signed, this is it, everything else will solve itself. And it won't, there's a lot of work that comes after that stage and people require to learn the new way of working together.

Theme music 30:55

Vaughn Tan 31:04
Okay, so before I let you go, I have one final question, what is the one industry or sector that you think we should be looking at, because it has the potential for the kind of innovation that you're looking at, driven by the kind of cross sector collaboration, that you're doing research on where that hasn't happened yet?

31:24
We see emerging science in social care and education and I would be very keen to see how those evolve over the next five years. I think it's going to be very interesting to observe them, especially because education is in many parts of the UK, partially public, but also there is a private provision available. So it would, it is rather comparable to health service.

Vaughn Tan 31:51
Very, very cool. Angela, that was super fun. It was really great to hear more about your work. I think we've obviously met before and I've looked at your stuff, but we've never had a whole hour to talk about it. So this was this was really great. Thanks for joining.

Angela Aristidou-Ritter 32:04
Thanks for having me, Vaughn.

Vaughn Tan 32:09
You've been listening to Mind Shift, a podcast about innovation from UCL School of Management.

Vaughn Tan 32:14

Today's guest was Angela Aristidou-Ritter and we'll put links to their research in the show notes.

Vaughn Tan 32:19
This episode was presented by myself Vaughn Tan, edited by Cerys Bradley, and produced by UCL School of Management.

Vaughn Tan 32:27
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