

The long-term behavioural implications of co-creation in economics education

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Thursday 2 September, 15:00-16:30 BST

The way Higher Education, HE, sectors around the world are organised and operate continues to be at the centre of an important debate. Over the years, regulatory reforms, together with societal and cultural changes, have favoured forms of marketisation of the sector, with students increasingly seen and treated as consumers. Taken to an extreme, it may be the case that sometimes students, who increasingly see themselves and are treated as consumers, may get detached from principles like *respect*, *reciprocity* and *responsibility*. The importance of these principles, sometimes referred to in the literature as the "3R", is often related to the increasing recognition of the importance that the development of soft skills (socio-emotional/meta-cognitive skills) may have for the future success of students.

It is also important to note that recent research from the fields of psychology, sociology and (behavioural) economics highlights the importance of soft skills to define the economic outcome of education. Kocha et al. (2015) highlights the importance of soft skills from a behavioural economics perspective. They review the insights of experimental evidence and behavioural theories that show how the approach to competitive environments, self-control, patience and (intrinsic) motivation can play major roles in academic and professional success of students. These factors can help understanding puzzling reports of differences in academic choices and also performance among different groups of students (e.g. in terms of gender and socio-economic backgrounds).

In this paper, we are going to focus specifically on the benefits of co-creation with a particular focus on economics education; we shall discuss in particular its potential to help students developing soft skills and on the intertemporal effects that carefully co-produced and deployed resources may have on future generations of students. Specifically, we highlight how social attributes, e.g. respect, reciprocity and responsibility, often associated with student/staff partnership are also key for the development of soft skills and the creation of an *education morale*, concept analogous to the one of *tax morale* described in the literature on tax compliance (Luttmer and Singhal (2014)).

We expand the discussion in Kocha et al. (2015) in a number of dimensions. First, to the behavioural traits already considered in Kocha et al. (2015), we include other dimensions, related to the way individual internalise and react to social stimuli, such as altruism, compassion, emotions. Second, we extend the framework introducing explicitly the effects of co-creation. We model both the direct effects of co-creation (e.g. increased partnership, active learning and development of soft skills) and indirect/intertemporal ones. We discuss how, if carefully planned and executed, co-creation can have intertemporal lasting effects on students and staff in a programme. On one side, it can influence the motivation and inclination to innovate of teachers. The emotional connections (based on the 3R) that co-creation activities can establish between academic staff and students can modify teaching

staff's behaviour in deeper ways than standard monetary incentives or awards for innovative teaching. At the same time, if the products of co-creation (for example teaching resources) were used to teach new students and introduce them to threshold concepts, the learning benefits of co-creation would reach multiple cohorts of students. If co-creation were appropriately promoted among students and it became a standard feature of a programme, this may unlock some form of *cultural transmission* via intertemporal peer effects: students exposed to material co-created by previous cohorts could be induced to appreciate the benefits of working with teachers and acquire hard and soft skills this way. Ultimately, via co-creation, intertemporal peer effects could influence student behaviour and, ultimately, create a sense of education morale. Students with a positive academic morale would be those who see themselves as part of a learning community and are inclined to contribute to the learning experience of other students.

To clarify our argument, we describe the set up and preliminary assessment of a co-creation activity that we have implemented in an intermediate microeconomics module.

Alexander Koch, Julia Nafziger and Helena Skyt Nielsen, (2015), "Behavioral economics of education", *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 115, 3–17.

Luttmer, E.F.P. and Singhal, M., (2014), "Tax morale", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28, pages 143-168.