

RIGHT HERE - RIGHT NOW

Mainstreaming co-production



Colin Daysh SSA,
is Head of IT/IS at
Belfast Metropolitan
College

This report from Nesta, was published half a decade ago in 2010 so, on first glance, its title seems inaccurate. Yet the concepts are perhaps more relevant now than they were then.

Although revealing its age through references to the Big Society, its description of the challenges of getting co-production into the mainstream is thought provoking and practical when set against the background of austerity, welfare reform and a fractured society.

Co-production offers solutions that not only have the potential to deliver high quality, efficient services, but also work to create and bolster communities. A world of co-production public services seems like a nice world to be part of.

This truly is collaborative transformation – user centric, delivering what users actually need and want, measuring benefits delivered across functional areas – it is a concept that can really transform services and people’s lives and the skills of the SSA and SS(PRAC) community can help to take it forward.

The dysfunctional relationship between the state and the people...

The report describes the challenge and the factors exacerbating that challenge (eg. demographic changes, changing expectations and new demands).

However, just why co-production is key to meeting the challenge is better expressed in the description of the dysfunctional relationship between the state and the people who are supposed to benefit.

People are generally knowledgeable about what is best for them and if they are given some measure of control over what happens to them, they tend to do better.

To be truly effective, co-production needs to be the default model of public service delivery, “the standard way of getting things done”.



Defining co-production is a challenge...

Definitions can be dry so the report gives us an understanding through examples, with four case studies as evidence of how different life could be.

In essence, co-production is “...where the people who are currently described as ‘providers’ and ‘users’ work together, pooling different kinds of knowledge and skill”.

Defining co-production is like defining a shared service or collaborative project – what should the service be like when this is all working?

Four main challenges are identified where further work is needed:

- commissioning co-production activity
- generating evidence of value
- taking successful co-production to scale
- developing professional skills.

The common theme is that moving co-production to the mainstream is neither simple nor easy.

The authors state, “...there will need to be profound changes in the way that people who work in public services – at all levels – understand their roles and carry them out”.

In essence, co-production is “where the people who are currently described as ‘providers’ and ‘users’ work together, pooling different kinds of knowledge and skill”.

“...there will need to be profound changes in the way that people who work in public services – at all levels – understand their roles and carry them out”

A similar approach as that used successfully for collaborative transformations including shared services.

What does the report recommend you think about?

The report’s recommendations fall under three themes:

- Changing the way services are managed and delivered.
- Changing the way services are commissioned.
- Opening up new opportunities.

The recommendations under each could easily be applied to our own work, just substitute “shared services” for “co-production” and it all seems very familiar.

For example:

- building key features into existing services,
- changing systems and structures,
- putting the right incentives in place,
- measuring what matters, and
- embedding the new system as a default model going forward.

Each of these has a direct read across to the successful introduction of collaborative transformation and so, although the report highlights the difficulties in getting co-production into the mainstream, the solutions that are offered can work; we have seen it with shared services.

You can download *Right Here Right Now* from <http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/co-production-right-here-right-now>

The people need to be different...

However, the recommendations also highlight where co-production can be very different to shared services. Delivering co-production is not only about the mechanics of how services are delivered and the systems behind it; the people need to be different.

For example, the recommendations include “radical” changes for frontline staff in training and incentives along with new criteria for recruitment. It is these differences that really stand out in the recommendations.

Co-production is about structural change in public services and we know from our experience that such change is possible, if challenging; but it is also about fundamental changes in the delivery of services at the frontline and that is perhaps where the biggest challenges lie.

The shared service cross-over...

This report explains the benefits of co-production and outlines the challenges faced in moving it to the mainstream.

On first reading, the challenges can seem insurmountable, but looking at it again, you can see parallels with introducing shared services.

Co-production offers many benefits and solutions to the challenges of today: more efficient services, empowered citizens, and a true sense of community.

It will be difficult to achieve, but just because it is difficult and hard, doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try.

The SSA and SS(PRAC) community has a lot to offer in applying our experience of introducing and making a success of similarly radical changes.