

CO-PRODUCTION

FROM POLICY INTENTION TO PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

Unlocking the resources of individuals,
communities and professionals at the
local level.



Co-production, from policy intention to practical implementation

Introduction



Elements of Co-production (sometimes called co-creation or parallel production) are now recognised as playing a core role in the improvement and transformation of public service delivery. There exists strong research evidence of its effectiveness, with good practical examples across the UK and internationally. Growing political and philosophical support for an alternative to market based and managerialist interventions means that co-production approaches are being successfully implemented to resolve some of society's most pressing issues.



This paper from The Kaizen Partnership Ltd (Kaizen) describes how this practical approach can be used by public service providers to harness the enormous potential that often lies untapped in communities, individuals and service delivery agencies.

It includes

- An evaluation of the value of co-production in service transformation
- An assessment of what co-production means in the context of public sector cuts
- Underlying principles and key characteristics of the co-production model
- Practical interventions to support its' use

Much of the approach draws from existing good professional practise. However, faced with public sector cuts there is now an urgent need to unlock community resources, assets and capacity as never before by developing collective participation in delivering the services and solutions that the state alone is unable to provide. This requires a much stronger approach to strategic commissioning and a new focus on practical implementation with an emphasis on the empowerment of the individual and local communities.

Context

UK public services are currently facing their most significant set of challenges in a generation, including the following list which is far from exhaustive:

- Overhanging public debt and consequent budget cuts coupled with rising demand in many service areas;
- Growing public expectation for service delivery;
- The step change in ability to create and share information about services, and the speedy propagation of myths, through social networking;
- Demographic changes;
- A crisis of faith in target based and process driven improvement approaches;
- An increasing disconnect of some communities from service providers and the democratic process;
- The need to integrate new ways of working brought on by the digital age.

Collectively these represent a “perfect storm”, and without doubt provide a considerable challenge that demand radically different approaches at both strategic and operational levels.

Classic tools for driving financial efficiency from existing delivery systems will play an important role but they will never provide the total solution. Efficiency and effectiveness are both required. Managerialist and market solutions (such as internal markets, business process reengineering, shared services, better procurement systems, and better information management) all focus on the supply side of services. They generally overlook the potential to add resources from what is often seen as the demand side. Indeed many of the decisions taken in the current round of cuts have the potential to create greater demand for benefits and services in other parts of system as well as increase inequality and community fragmentation.

Some current models of service delivery actively disempower individuals or communities from self help or collective action to tackle issues. This can lead to greater dependency and at times a waste of resources as services are created and delivered without meaningful input from their target users.

Public service organisations, (and we are including in this Local Authorities, Health providers, Criminal Justice, Education services and parts of the 3rd sector) have in the past found it easier or quicker to produce top down solutions - to “do things to” the “needy and vulnerable”, tackling the immediate presenting issue rather than the broader underlying issues. Other criticisms of public sector organisations have included:

- Services and organisations operating in silos
- A reluctance at times to focus resources on emerging needs
- Endless chopping and changing in public sector reform
- Short termism and the desire for “quick wins” to suit political agendas
- Clipboard assessments and inspection approaches
- An aversion to taking innovative risks
- A failure to recognise the links between social and economic systems at the local level

So it is not surprising that Central Government and local public services agencies are considering afresh how to transform services to maximise efficiency, effectiveness and the role of the individual in their delivery.

This sea change in approach has seen a range of new initiatives, for example, the exploration of outcomes based strategic design; Total Place type “joining up” of service planning and resourcing; strategic commissioning; Big Society policy development and a new vision of localism currently under active consideration. Localities will choose the approaches that work best for them. However, the fundamentals of co-production underlie almost all of them.



We do not suggest that Co-production is a universal panacea, more an important set of principles for transformational activity. It is not an alternative to public services, more a method of transformation

in making services effective, affordable and sustainable. In tapping the latent resources of individuals and communities the approach can make significant impacts on:

- Top level outcomes across localities
- The Wellbeing agenda
- Community and individual engagement
- Service and solution quality
- Professional morale and opportunity to innovate
- The reduction of waste in current delivery approaches
- Cost - by shifting focus towards community led preventative services rather than more expensive remedial services



What is Co-production, how and where is it best used?

There are a variety of definitions but perhaps the most straightforward generic one is:

“delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families, and neighbourhoods.”

An essential component is that professional skills and individual or community knowledge and skills are pooled to design and deliver services and solutions. The most powerful examples of successful Co-production are informed by the guiding principles below:

1. The recognition that people are assets, not passive recipients, consumers or “drains” on systems.
2. The acknowledgement that communities and individuals have untapped capacities and skills. The promotion of the values of respect, mutuality and reciprocity.
3. The role of public and third sector agencies as skilled catalysts, facilitators and co-designers of services rather than just producers.
4. The recognition of the importance of harnessing peer support networks to transfer knowledge and skills and to support and sustain change.

The approach is highly relational and as such is most powerful where the skills of professionals and the life experiences of service users and / or communities are both acknowledged as essential ingredients in the design and delivery of solutions.

The principles of co-production are rightly tailored differently for specific services areas or localities based on existing experiences of what works. Prescriptive toolkits are unhelpful but using the principles set out above to drive local approaches sustains long term cycles of innovation. By active participation in service design and delivery, individuals and communities grow their capacity and desire to engage with other forms of democratic or community governance. This has been seen as a by-product of a co-production approach. At Kaizen with our strong history and emphasis on community engagement work we see it as one of its main benefits; those who have most to gain from using co-production approaches are often those most disempowered or marginalised in existing service approaches.

To date, the most significant areas for the development of the approach have been in healthcare, adult social care, elderly care, regeneration, mental health, supported housing, education, early years, youth services, childcare and families, criminal justice and community policing. Whilst this paper can not set out at length there are many strong examples of co-production in practise. Taff Housing www.taffhousing.co.uk, Family Nurse Partnerships, Keyring www.keyring.org.uk and Uservoice www.uservoice.org all provide live practical examples.

There are relatively few areas which will not gain significantly from a co-production approach. These are usually where the professional input to a service is of a highly specialised or technical nature (e.g. emergency health care or surgery).

Co-production - tools to aid effective implementation

There is no “one size fits all” approach to co-production. Local circumstances, history, culture, community cohesion and engagement, needs and professional capacity will all have an impact. Different localities will be seeking different outcomes: for some it’s ensuring strategic commissioning approaches deliver real value across the board, for others it might be a particular service that requires transformation at times of budget cuts.

At Kaizen we have developed a “Co-production Readiness Tool” to help identify what support will be needed in moving towards the adoption of a co-production approach. This could be used in respect to individuals or groups and can operate as a guide to benchmark where things are at, where they will need to be for effective co-production and identify the areas that need improvement.

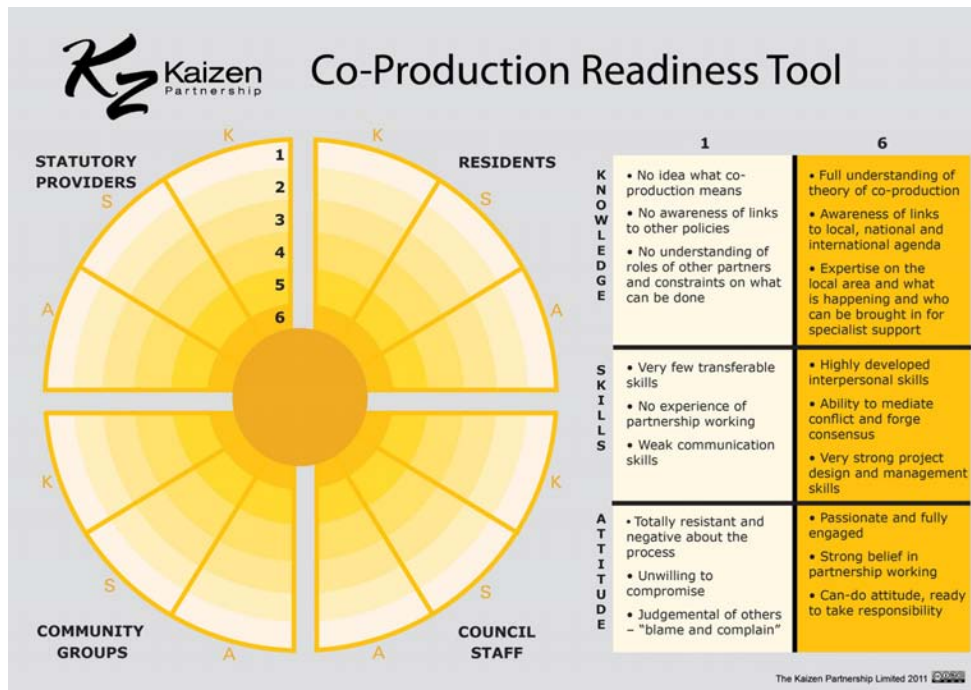
In order for effective co-production to occur, each and every party in the co-production needs to have a sufficient level of core capacity. We divide this capacity into 3 areas:

1. Knowledge – what does a person need to know, be aware of or understand.

- 2. Skills** – what does a person need to be able to do. This can further be sub-divided into “hard skills” which are practical in nature (e.g. proficient in use of IT or in understanding financial statements) and “soft skills” which are interpersonal (e.g. able to resolve conflict, able to communicate effectively.)
- 3. Attitude** – what attitudes does a person need to have. Underlying attitudes can be beliefs about self, others or the world – which can be positive or negative.

We have used the examples of these four groups, but the same approach can obviously be used with any set of groups or individuals.

Whilst there may be no strict ladder of Co-production approaches that can be easily mapped, we have identified groupings of approaches or steps towards co-production. None is necessarily better than others, all depend on circumstance and desired outcome. However evidence suggests that moving towards full co-production has real and sustained benefits. These groupings are not necessarily linear, often overlap and are useful in helping to frame understanding about what could change.



CO-PRODUCTION READINESS TOOL

The Co-production Readiness Tool can be used in a number of ways:

- In the planning stages of a project to assess the current situation in order to identify possible barriers to a successful co-production implementation
- In a “live” situation (such as a training workshop or facilitated meeting) as a self assessment tool for each group
- For assessing the training needs of a group at any given stage in the process

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT	<p>Whilst not exhibiting all the elements of co-production referred to above, active involvement is the usual launch pad for service transformation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be some degree of dialogue with service users, often ad hoc via unrepresentative user bodies. • Feedback loops, service user groups or customer service circles will be in use, with users as consumers who comments upon elements of an existing service. • There are the beginnings of dialogue and a willingness to explore co-production further.
CO-DESIGN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the typical first step towards full co-production. Service users will be involved to a degree in design, usually at the time of commissioning or annual service planning. • There will be a good understanding of need and desired outcomes though often there will be little involvement from users in problem definition. • If this stage is thoroughly and powerfully undertaken it can have a major impact on shaping a service and developing new solutions. However, it tends to be most intensely resourced when there is a professional need for input rather than an ongoing relationship of mutuality and reciprocity. • The quality of real design methodology behind the approach is often varied, seldom is the innovation potential in proper use of design fully realised. • Once designed the user or community generally becomes a more passive consumer until asked to contribute again.
CO-DELIVERY	<p>This is generally a step on from the more “sporadic” co-design to a more permanent relationship where the professional and service user or community are both actively involved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach can be tightly managed with formal governance and responsibilities or more loosely based on the quality of trust and relationships. • Relationships, accountability, mutuality and the support networks required to enable a full and equal contribution from the individual or community vary in quality. • In many cases when co-delivery is implemented it will inevitably and eventually tip over into full co-production. This “tipping” can be planned for and expedited with the right interventions.
FULL CO-PRODUCTION	<p>At this stage most or all of the 4 principles of co-production are present or being actively developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The operating and commissioning systems of services recognise and reward their importance. • Innovation in approaches is an equal and easier process and service users or communities are enthusiastic in taking on quality control and improvement type work, e.g. the recruitment of professional staff etc.

Co-production - making it happen

We suggest building co-production principles into existing transformation, change or service improvement approaches. Some or all of the following might be appropriate depending on the locality and its state of readiness.

Existing transformation approaches

Many large scale change programmes are currently heavily focused on enhancing efficiencies in current systems, rather than improving effectiveness in achieving outcomes. Unlocking the new capabilities that co-production allows can be built into effectiveness and value for money programmes to give greater balance and long term benefits for communities and public service organisations.

- Localities pursuing a 'Total Place' approach across sectors can use co-production at a strategic level.
- Localities which are actively strengthening their approaches around achieving outcomes can use co-production principles and approach to measure what matters. For example through the use of co-production audits embedding social, environmental and wellbeing outcomes in performance frameworks, and through rewarding and incentivising reciprocal behaviours.
- Where personalisation of services is being implemented, developing a peer support network of service users can create real value for both service users and funders.

Strategic commissioning

Organisations embarking on a more rigorous approach to commissioning outcomes and services can ensure that commissioners, frontline staff and 3rd sector organisations fully understand and are skilled at using co-production methodology. This will tap into new resources to assist in needs analysis, solution design, delivery and evaluation in order to achieve outcomes.

Existing service improvement activity

There are examples where co-production has become a requirement of an annual service planning regime. However, better outcomes have generally been obtained by developing all staff's knowledge and skills of the co-production approach so that they see service users as assets in service delivery. The creation of peer and

support networks for service users, asset mapping at the local level, understanding who is and isn't currently involved in service delivery have all proved valuable. It is better to aim for universal ownership of the approach across services rather than having a co-production 'expert' unit as this tends to achieve better outcomes.

Staff development

If co-production principles and approach are fully embraced then the role of front line staff will change over time. They will cease to be "fixers" of presenting issues and instead will become active partners, mentors, facilitators and catalysts. This may involve training and development in the values and skill sets of co-production. It will also mean revisiting recognition and reward, greater delegated autonomy, the restructuring of roles to make reciprocal relationships work well, and longer term changes to recruitment of front line staff.

Conclusion

We do not suggest that co-production solutions will always be simple or easy to deliver. But the scale and complexity of the challenges we face mean that simple solutions are a pipe dream. Implementing co-production will mean compromise from all parties and the role of honest broker will be essential to bridge between divergent views and to create links between the professionals and the community, (as well as within each group, as neither are in fact cohesive entities). This will take time, positive leadership from all sides and a willingness to put aside personal agendas in order to create common cause. The stakes are high and failure will keep us locked into cycles of blame and complain that serve no one. The opportunity is here for all of us to play our part in dealing with the myriad of issues we face, setting in motion a new paradigm of cooperation between state and citizen.



The Kaizen Partnership Ltd support offer

For 10 years Kaizen has worked successfully with a range of clients in complex and highly practical fields of community engagement and capacity building, always working towards particular goals or project outcomes that we have jointly agreed. Co-production is in our blood and in the way that we develop projects with clients. We always start by understanding the climate or system that we are working in and then tailoring a programme that will meet the needs of that client in that particular situation. Unlike some organisations, while we have tried and tested tools and approaches we don't use a standard approach for every assignment; in our experience that proves unsatisfactory for the client (and ultimately for our creative staff as well).



We are experiencing real interest from our clients in co-production and how they can tap into its undoubted potential. Given that much of our work has been based on creating reciprocal relationships of trust between public service agencies and their clients, we have sought to set out where we believe we can assist clients with their development approaches.

Kaizen is a training and consultancy company that specialises in designing and facilitating cutting edge projects. Everything we do is focused on making a difference: empowering individuals, teams and communities. Jonny Zander is a founding director of Kaizen; Alex Bailey is a Kaizen Director and a former Chief Executive of Brighton and Hove; Nathan Roberts is Kaizen Head of Operations; Jo Broadwood is a Kaizen senior trainer and a former specialist Community Cohesion adviser for Department of Communities and Local Government.

Using our insights and experience in the field and our wide group of skilled associates we are able to assist clients in the following areas.

1. **Strategic start up advice**, assisting with education or cultural understanding as to the value of co-production, practical examples and benefits to particular localities or services, auditing readiness and designing with clients the most effective ways forward.
2. **Embedding in local change or transformation programmes**. We are skilled at working with existing programmes to ensure that co-production can be delivered effectively. Whether under financial efficiency/vfm, customer service, commissioning or big society/stronger communities themes we can help shape those programmes to maximum effect.
3. **Organisational development/staff or service user training**. New approaches need new skills and operating systems. We can help with the training, skills and values inputs or with shaping different performance, risk or reward approaches where appropriate.
4. **Process management**. We are happy to jointly run a co-production exercise with professional staff and service users to other partners, ensuring not just a successful and sustainable outcome to the process but skills transfer to those involved to build upon for the future.

This list is by no means exhaustive and we are very happy to talk with clients about their particular needs and whether we can support them in different ways.

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