

Understanding Co-production

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At *dialogue matters* we are enthusiastic about the ethos of co-production and encourage it where ever we can. We hope this short explanation provides some useful insight into what it is all about.

Definitions

Since Elinor Ostrom used the phrase in the 1970's, definitions of 'co-production' vary and are contested and it is described as a 'slippery' concept (INLOGOV 2013). One of the most quoted definitions in England is "Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change" *New Economics Foundation/NESTA*

Discussion about co-production of public services, sometimes describe the reciprocal relationship as between 'users' of the service (citizens) and 'professionals' (providers of the service). However this thinking still embodies a hierarchical view of providers and consumers.

A more equitable relationship results when citizens (and third sector) are recognised and valued as agents who can be actively involved in shaping and delivering services with improved outcomes.

Our own working definition is as follows:

Co-production is a 'reciprocal relationship between citizens, the 3rd sector, and public bodies which draws on the resources (such as time, effort, energy, information, know-how, innovations, skills and funds) of each to share in the design, development and delivery of agreed actions to result in shared benefits'.

Diana Pound. Dialogue Matters

Co-design and co-production for the natural environment

In the UK, there are few examples where projects have deliberately taken a co-production approach to sustainability research or natural resource management. However there are many examples of where something close to co-production has emerged. Examples we have had some involvement with include: fishers and scientists doing research together as partners, owners and occupiers of SSSI undertaking positive conservation action in agreement with relevant agencies, upstream collaborations between farmers, water companies and the agency to enhance water quality and manage water flows, citizen science, voluntary wardening and data collection of a coastal area, production of codes of conduct for recreation activities with self-policing, and recreation users working with the police on countryside crime.

Since these have emerged without a deliberate co-production ethos, environmental sustainability has significant potential to demonstrate co-production in practice.

At the time of writing (spring 2014) we are just embarking on the first Stakeholder Dialogue process we have been free to design in a way that deliberately fosters the co-design and co-production of new initiatives. This work is to help people agree the contents of a plan and shared new initiatives for the management of a new coastal National Park on Jersey.

Shift in thinking at organisational level

A co-production approach will mean organisations with responsibilities for the natural environment (eg public bodies, large environmental charities, research institutes) go beyond involving people so they can express their opinions, whilst holding onto decision making power and responsibility for delivery, to sharing the challenge, opportunity, decisions and implementation as a shared endeavour.

The table below illustrates the spectrum of ways that professional organisations can relate to other stakeholders:

		Responsibility for designing & planning what happens		
		Professionals Sole Design	Professionals design with users and community	Users and community design
Responsibility for delivery	Professionals Sole Delivery	Traditional professional service	All design. Professionals responsible for delivery (participation)	Users design, professionals deliver
	Shared delivery	Professionals design, shared delivery	Full co-production	Users design, shared delivery
	Users and communities Sole Delivery	Professionals design, users/community deliver	Shared design. Users/community deliver	Self organised user/community provision

Adapted from Carnegie Trust 2006

This shift in thinking will need to include the way managers and power holders within organisations relate to the front line staff who are likely to be the ones engaging with others in service delivery. If front line staff are disempowered by their own organisations, they are not going to be able to function in a co-productive relationship with others. The most exciting proposed transition we have seen outlined is in Annex 1 and comes from the Welsh Government for the way it envisages delivering sustainability.

If our public bodies, large charities, and research institutes are to use the ethos of co-production in their work, it will require shifts in the following:

- Attitudes towards others and their knowledge and opportunity to influence
- Procedures that are more flexible, adaptive, experimental and open
- Best practice dialogue and participatory decision making
- Outcomes that are more holistic, integrated and sustainable (in both senses of the word)
- Evaluation/monitoring of delivery that goes beyond science monitoring and evidence, to include broader metrics eg around social and citizen wellbeing.

Shift in thinking by professionals

Shifting to co-design and co-production may be a particular challenge for many professionals in the environment sector. From our experience of working with and training people with a background in natural science, we know there is a tendency for them to see science as the exclusive source of authoritative knowledge, and to hold the view that it should therefore direct decision-making and be the main determinant of what happens. This makes it difficult to accept the legitimacy of others knowledge or their role and influence in shaping what happens. To do so requires the change outlined below:

Change in attitude of environmental managers	
From:	To:
Focus on scientific and technical knowledge	Many forms of knowledge are needed and used
Seeing other stakeholders as the problem	Realising we are all part of the problem (and all part of the solution)
Seeing other stakeholders as a distraction and drain on resources	Realising they are a resource – of information, ideas and endeavour
Telling others what to do	Listening with an open mind
Pushing others to change	Working with others to agree change
Behaving as experts	Behaving as partners
Formal approaches	Informal and interactive approaches
Our ideas and solutions	The best most workable ideas and solutions

Diana Pound in 'The Ecosystems Approach applied to spatial planning'. Bioforum Project (European Biodiversity Forum – implementing the Ecosystem Approach) 2005.

For public bodies and researchers to transition to this type of thinking will take time. One of the organisation change models, (Roger 1983) classifies individuals and the speed with which they become 'players' ie actively involved in new ways of functioning and delivering organisational goals. He identifies innovators (2.5%) early adopters (13.5%) early majority (34%) late Majority (34%) and laggards (16%).

Early adopters will need to be considerate towards those who have not yet made the transition in thinking.

Any organisational process seeking to make the transition in its staff from professional expert environmentalists to partners in co-production, will need to be handled with care, sensitivity and a long term view.

Resources:

A brilliant short animation about co-production with a voiceover by Brian Blessed. Check out the parable of the Blobs and Squares at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egav5xjb-lg>

Annex 1: Sustainable Futures Development Architecture

Co-producing for Sustainability

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BEFORE	AFTER
Fit	
We used to think this....	But now we have evidence that...
<p>CONSULTATION</p> <p>We need to work out what we think is possible, formally ask the public about it, adapt our views in light of this, then advise our Minister or chief executive on possible ways forward, then devise some implementation methods and consult again on these, then back to the Minister for approval etc ...</p>	<p>CO-PRODUCTION</p> <p>We need to engage Ministers early and secure their on-going involvement with officials and stakeholders. We need to deliver the Programme for Government (or equivalent) by working with others to develop shared outcomes, projects and reporting mechanisms.</p>
<p>INTERVENTION</p> <p>We need to intervene to break an unhealthy pattern or mend something that has broken; based on a patient-expert, victim-helper or problem-solution model.</p>	<p>PREVENTION</p> <p>We need to work together to increase interdependency between citizens and the public sector. Behaviours can be changed more successfully if people have direct ownership and make use of their own and others' experience as equal participants, rather than simply being customers subjected to services or publicity campaigns.</p>
<p>SILO WORKING</p> <p>I only listen to feedback about my own area of responsibility. Even if I am the only representative from my organisation in the room; other matters are for other people not for me.</p>	<p>COLLEGIATE RESPONSIBILITY</p> <p>All feedback is a learning opportunity. If I receive feedback on any aspect of my organisation's operations, I have responsibility for identifying someone with an interest in this aspect of our work, passing on the message in person and assisting if I can.</p>
Impact	
We used to think this....	But now we have evidence that...
<p>PROBLEMS</p> <p>Problems are solved by reducing them to their individual parts, creating specific agencies and solutions to solve each one and tackling each issue separately.</p>	<p>PLACES</p> <p>We need to start by looking at the combined impacts of our actions in the real world; discover more about the links between the people, places and communities that are affected; share our knowledge and develop integrated approaches which attempt to solve multiple challenges.</p>
<p>SHORT TERM FIXES</p> <p>Based in the recipient/consumer model we provide pick lists of services or interventions, aimed at day-to-day symptoms instead of underlying causes, with no flexibility for clients or professionals.</p>	<p>LONG TERM RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p>To solve tough problems, we need everyone at the table; the recipient or customer has just as much to bring as the field expert. We need to commit to people to help discover and build on all our strengths and increase trust.</p>
<p>MEASURING</p> <p>We need to work out what information and evidence we need for each individual project or policy and set up contracts to provide this by designing new research projects from scratch.</p>	<p>SENSING</p> <p>We need to maximise use of existing information and long term data sources and to develop the knowledge and skills of specialists and non-specialists by integrating science and research (their development and use) into policy and delivery.</p>

Cost	
We used to think this....	But now we have evidence that...
EFFICIENCY To achieve outcomes we need to make everything as big, simple and fast as possible, using the minimum possible resources; including human resources.	RESILIENCE We need to be efficient with our use of physical resources through whole life-cycle design and engineering; reduce, reuse, recycle. For human and natural resources we need to increase resilience i.e. our long term ability to cope with change through continuous learning.
RISK MINIMISATION We put our faith in carefully designed risk logs and detailed processes that protect us from criticism and help identify the cause after failures have occurred.	RISK MANAGEMENT We can learn and improve only by taking risks. Increasing our understanding of the substantial long term risks facing us now and in the future, helps to increase our appetite for taking appropriately managed short term risks.
TRANSACTIONING We need to bargain for the cheapest deal to get as much as we can for the smallest possible outlay.	GIFTING We need to be generous with our time, effort and skills, while being clear about sustainable development principles such as the need for protection and enhancement of Wales' assets (social, physical and environmental capital).
Mechanism	
We used to think this....	But now we have evidence that...
POWER We need to work out what to do (in great detail), then secure funding and then tell/convince other people to do it.	PLAY Leadership happens all over the place. We need to share evidence and work together to identify the best, coordinated way forward; creativity is the key.
SCALING UP We need to create easily replicated models/projects and then reproduce them everywhere else.	INSPIRING ACROSS We need to learn from real experiments on the ground and use these to inspire others to take similar, yet different, approaches elsewhere.
CHECK We need to plan and monitor in as much detail as possible, on paper or on a computer, to ensure that every aspect is completed on schedule.	FLOW We need just enough process to support everyone to achieving the outcomes through trying, failing and trying again; measuring success, learning lessons and discovering more as we go.
Management	
We used to think this....	But now we have evidence that...
HERO We believe that we are the only one who can solve the problem; if only I just work longer hours, learn this new technique or mend my ways. Or we believe that someone else will be the hero and come to save us.	HOST We can't do it alone. If we invite diverse people to come together and have focused conversations about real problems then we can create, manage and deliver solutions that will last. We need to practice and develop our hosting skills.
CORPORATE CONSISTENCY To be successful everyone needs to conform to the same basic bureaucratic patterns and behaviours.	APPRECIATING DIVERSITY To be resilient we need a diverse, enthusiastic work force held together by a desire to learn and a commitment to the civil service (or other ethical) code.