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The Manchester Briefing COVID-19

International lessons for local and national government recovery and renewal

What is 'The Manchester Briefing on COVID-19'?

The Manchester Briefing on COVID-19 is aimed at those who plan and implement Recovery and Renewal from COVID-19, including government, emergency planners, resilience officers, the voluntary sector, and communities.

Over the last 18 months we have shared +600 lessons on Recovery and Renewal which you can find on our Database.

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https://tinyurl.com/5en2ebez

Watch: 15/12/2021

New Zealand: Wellington Region's Community Emergency Hub

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Co-producing strategy for societal resilience

Introduction

Co-production is a popular approach to service design and delivery and has been found to exist in all sectors of public services including education, agriculture, health, local governance, and information technology among others (Khine et al., 2021). At its simplest, it involves working with others to design and deliver strategies with the aim of achieving a collective outcome, in our case, to build societal resilience. Some examples of co-production activities include:

- working with small businesses to improve supply chain resilience and collaborate to implement new sector standards that lead to more resilient supply

- collaborate with voluntary sector organisations to develop new processes that encourage disaster volunteers to work through existing charities and official structures

- conducting workshops with communities to think through how their community group can integrate with resilience partnerships – and then implement those for preparedness and response activities

- facilitating training and mentorship opportunities to equip participants with necessary skills to support in the co-production process

Last month's TMB 47 outlined an initial definition for whole-of-society resilience and noted how societal resilience should be co-produced as a collaboration across resilience partnerships, sector partners and communities. This article explains co-production for resilience and explores how it can support the design and delivery of resilient society.

This article builds on TMB 33 when we explored the difficulty of co-production during the response phase of a crisis.

Understanding co-production

Co-production describes an approach where an outcome is jointly created by a range of people with potentially different experiences e.g. the involvement of leaders, service providers, practitioners, service users, members of the public. Through co-production people can collaborate in the design of public services and interventions (Brudney and England, 1983; Oliver et al., 2019). The broad range of stakeholders encourages the more efficient use of financial and human resources to deliver public services/interventions, and can reduce costs (Thomasen et al., 2015). An important aspect of 'reduced costs' is that public participation (e.g. through volunteering) should be complementary to officials' contributions, rather than as a "substitutive/cost shifting" mechanism (McLennon et al., 2016: 2042). Departing from the traditional form of top-down design and delivery of services and interventions, co-production relies on wider stakeholders as active participants and negotiators in decision-making processes (Brudney and England, 1983). The primary aim is to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and public value of services/interventions in meeting the needs and priorities of users (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Bracci at al., 2016; McLennon et al., 2016). Co-production creates an opportunity for renewal in how professionals and politicians meaningfully engage with users and society – acknowledging that those who are affected by a service or intervention are well placed to help design and implement it (Boyle and Harris, 2009).

Opportunities and challenges of co-production

Co-production has been found to contribute to sustainable development (Turnhout et al., 2020) as it encourages citizenship and ownership through community participation (Whitaker, 1980). Research shows that involving members of the public in the design and delivery of services increases the: probability of their successful delivery; sustainability of a service/intervention; and meeting of users' expectations and needs (Bovaird, 2007; Bettencourt et al., 2002). In the case of local resilience, co-developing activities *with* communities aligns resilience with the local values, needs, vision and ambitions for the future (Bovaird, 2007; Helfgott, 2018). Building resilience takes time, and resources to facilitate local resilience capabilities can often be short-term (Ibid). Therefore, involving members of the community in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of local resilience in a meaningful way can positively impact the sustainability of them (Haustein and Lorson, 2021).

Developing practices from within communities and leveraging those pre-existing structures taps into community resources and capabilities that are already present. Co-production can strengthen the effectiveness of practices as they are informed by local intelligence, encourages local ownership and leadership, and can build the agency and self-organising capabilities of communities (McLennon et al., 2016). Involving members of the public in the design and delivery of services that directly or indirectly impact them can also build trust between those in leadership and members of the community (Fledderus et al., 2014).

Benefits of co-production for service deliverers and beneficiaries include:

- *More effective services* – Co-design and delivery of services can ensure they better align with the needs of service users, whilst heightening accountability for the resources used (Roggeveen at al., 2012)
- *Increased levels of satisfaction* – The participation of members of the public in decision-making processes promotes trust, communication, transparency, and satisfaction in the service being delivered. This can help to build stronger, more resilient communities and develop sustainability in services (Auh et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2019)
- *Improved relationships* – Co-production fosters the development of better relationships between members of the public, leaders, and practitioners through mutual learning and responsiveness (Brudney, 1985). It has also led to a reduction of negative stereotypes and improved trust between members of the public and those in leadership positions (Kim, 2010)
- *Improved democratic quality* – Co-production promotes meaningful engagement and seeks to give members of the public equal influence in decision-making processes (Boyle and Harris, 2009). Centralising equity in co-production processes gives a voice to those who might not otherwise have one, fostering an environment where everyone can share their perspectives (Vanleene at al., 2015)

Although co-production offers advantages, it comes with challenges. Adopting co-production as a method of design and delivery requires a change of culture and mind-set from leaders, service providers, practitioners, service users, and communities (Durose et al., 2013). If co-production is to be given the best chance for success the following aspects should be considered carefully with moderating measures implemented to mitigate their occurrence:

- *Low trust causing reduced participation* – Generating 'buy-in' from diverse groups of stakeholders may come as a challenge. It is fundamental that those leading co-production create an inclusive, supportive, and enabling environment that fosters trust and where everyone feels valued and has an opportunity to participate (Whitaker, 1980)
- *Bias* – Self-serving bias may occur where some participants contribute ideas that favour their personal interests more so than those of their wider community. This may encourage participants to feel that their contributions are more important than those of others which may lead to conflict (Vanleene at al., 2015). It is therefore essential to ensure wide representation based on the diversity principle of co-production (see following section on principles and techniques)
- *Worsened inequalities* – Co-production may sometimes lead to the crowding in/out where some groups may have less or more participants. This may lead to unfair representation and pushing of selfish group agendas. In such instances, some participants may feel disadvantaged and limited if their contributions are not considered – leading to worsened inequalities (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004)
- *Low impact* – Co-production may sometimes lead to a lack of impact if not applied correctly. In some instances, members of the public have been involved only in the design, being excluded from how the design is delivered or failing to receive the outcomes. This fails to meet the principles of co-production and leads to development of mistrust (Gebauer et al., 2013) – reiterating the need to keep members of the public involved in all the stages to sustain the relationship through accessibility and ownership

The following section brings together some principles of co-production which may support moderating the potential pitfalls of co-production

Principles and key considerations for co-production

To mitigate the potential pitfalls of co-production, the Social Care Institute for Excellence offer four principles that can guide successful processes for co-production:

- *Equality* - Co-production recognises that members of the public, leaders and practitioners are all essential to the process and that they may possess knowledge, skills and abilities that can contribute to the end goal. For instance, engaging directly with different communities/groups or those who represent them (e.g. faith leaders/the voluntary sector) so that communications are delivered by trusted community voices.
- *Diversity* - Co-production emphasises the essence of representation in the process through the involvement of all people. It is critical to consider and identify potential barriers related to socio-cultural issues, language, literacy levels, ethnicity, and gender discrimination. This can be achieved through various ways such as providing facilitation and translation services, or offering separate meetings that enable women, people with disabilities, specific ethnic minorities, and other groups to participate.
- *Accessibility* - Ensuring that those involved all have access to the entire process (design, delivery, review) is fundamental to the impact and success of co-production. Putting into consideration the timing and location of co-production activities, for example the accessibility of buildings and work/school schedules to ensure accessibility and encourage participation.
- *Reciprocity* – Establishing a mechanism whereby those who contribute feel valued. For instance, reporting the outcome to participants and the impact of their participation in how the intervention has changed as a result of their contribution.

Techniques of co-production

Chamber et al., (2021) present six reasons for doing co-production from their research of 32 diverse case studies. The table below presents the six reasons, the risks associated with each reason, and the potential moderating activities for each risk (Ibid: 987):

Reason	Risk	Potential moderating activity
TO RESEARCH SOLUTIONS TO DESIGN A SERVICE	Unable to access of diverse/marginalized voices to feed into the design, so loses their different perspectives and reinforces the "status quo"	Ensure continuous information and feedback exchange between stakeholders to critique the emerging design
TO EMPOWER VOICES	Biased representation of perspectives may tip towards specific agendas (or stronger voices) and reduce relevance for other groups/agendas	Careful, balanced selection of perspectives to integrate into the evidence base
TO BROKER POWER	Engaging only powerful actors can reinforce current power relations	Careful, balanced selection of participants and involve third party brokers to support the reframing of problems and solutions
TO REFRAME POWER	Bringing powerful and marginalised voices together can generate conflict and undermine a safe space for discussion	If the aim is to reframe power, strong institutional support and multi-level partnerships is key
TO NAVIGATE DIFFERENCES	Powerful actors don't share entrenched perspective nor accommodate alternative points of view	Allow for deep-seated differences to be explored and navigated over a longer period of time – rather than rushing to solutions that fail to bridge engrained differences
TO REFRAME AGENCY	Struggle to engage high-level actors who are concerned about losing influence over design and delivery	Negotiate and generate buy-in early by those interested in reframing their agency and enhancing relationships with others for more impact

Conclusion

This briefing has demonstrated that effective service design and resilience building practices can benefit from inputs from a range of stakeholders. Individuals, communities, the business and voluntary sectors, possess invaluable local knowledge and abilities to identify and reduce risk and pinpoint vulnerabilities. Their collaboration in design and delivery of resilience activities can enhance local agency, ownership, and the sustainability of new services/interventions. We conclude this briefing by setting out some key takeaway points for successful co-production:

1. **Co-production should embed the values, needs, vision and ambitions for the future of all those involved** in the design and delivery of services/interventions. A culture of risk awareness should be promoted whereby the benefits and all potential and actual outcomes are well understood by leaders, service providers, practitioners, service users, and/or members of the public.

2. **All stakeholders should be involved throughout each stage of the full co-production process in a structured, inclusive, and accessible manner.** For example, the development of plans and project developments, goal setting, delivery mechanisms, identification and distribution of leadership and participatory roles, communication, and feedback structures.

3. **The practice of co-production takes ideas and converts conversations into action.** This may require offering the necessary training and support to those involved, providing access to the processes and practices, and building community capacity are practices that support co-production.

4. **Co-production is not always a one-off activity, rather, an ongoing process.** With this in mind, it is essential that the entire process is monitored, milestones be marked, outcomes be measured, and the results reviewed to identify areas that require improvement.

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