



Co-production – putting people at the centre post Williams

Co-production starts with the people, not the systems.
Williams starts with the systems, not the people.

In theory

Yes



In practice

No



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The case for co-production is now won.

WCVA, with others has argued in *Putting people at the centre* that there is an urgent need to transform public services in Wales by:

- Treating people and communities as assets and equals in design and delivery
- Building services around the person and community
- Unlocking potential resources of time, money and expertise to combine with state funding
- Using existing state resources to enable and maximise citizen and community action, capital and care

And that change is needed now because:

- Money is running out
- Efficiencies alone will not be enough
- Demand for acute services is rising
- Preventative and community services are being cut
- Quality of life cannot be delivered by the state alone
- Community action and volunteering is not being capitalised
- Communities need to be resilient at the local neighbourhood level

The Williams Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery agrees

'the only viable way to meet the needs and aspirations of people is to shift the emphasis of public service towards **co-production and prevention**. The need to make this change is shared across the developed and democratic world.'

Structural change alone is not enough. Urgent and radical action is needed before it is too late.

But then the Commission proposes more of the same...

Fewer local authorities, a public sector shared services organisation, a digital and IT strategy, a new Academi/PSMW, a new performance framework...and all this taken forward being implemented through existing mechanisms!

Process not people?

So, the words move on. Co-production is the new mantra but co-production is not just about the public sector and its structures, leadership training and targets. The public sector has still to embrace the 'co' in co-production and fully recognise this is not a new word for partnership or a new management theory for government. The 'co' is the people and recognising and mobilising their contribution as assets is still absent.

Not

'our service users are all very vulnerable so we have to be careful about what we can let them do'

But

People's lives and broader life experience is central to how the service is run and we value the contribution that people who use the service make as equal to that of paid staff.

Many authorities are engaging more. But the question they ask communities are either too vague

What sort of community do you want?

Or too specific

Should we close your library or leisure centre?

Authorities rarely ask questions which involve, mobilise or excite.

What would you like to do with us to improve the area?

There is a growing illusion that there is a large reservoir of people just waiting to be 'used' when the money runs out or is getting tight

'many elderly will no longer be eligible for our services but we can fill the gap with volunteers and call it co-production'

But this approach won't work because people do not want to take over public services on their own and volunteer for the council, because they feel they have already paid for the service.

When NHS England announced it would recruit 100,000 volunteers to check on elderly people, it completely failed because it didn't work with the existing volunteer and voluntary organisations¹.

So there are large numbers of people who already are the social capital of the community and make the difference between isolation and neglect but they will decide how, when and where.

Expanding this contribution means creating a more equal relationship.

Not

We like to find opportunities for people to do some volunteering if they are capable. We always give people a certificate.

But

We do record the value and contribution people make to the service, because we know the service would not run as effectively as it does if everyone did not contribute their skills and experience.

¹ Source - BBC News website 27 January 2014: NHS Winter Friends campaign launched in November 2013 encourages people to check on elderly friends and neighbours. The aim was to get 100,000 volunteers but only 2,000 had applied. In interview on BBC Radio 5 Live's Breakfast the point was made that it would have been more successful if the campaign had worked with existing, experienced volunteering organisations.

There is growing evidence that co-production works and an intense interest in how to do it. Co-production is not about handing over everything to volunteers and charities but it is about working more flexibly and closely with them to design and deliver.

The third sector doesn't do brain surgery but it does know how to enthuse, motivate and organise people and create community ownership and structures.

Co-production is now at a crossroads. It will not work without mobilising, recognising and rewarding people and their contributions alongside those of the statutory services.

Putting people at the centre means there is not one right way of doing things and no universal delivery mechanism, except to start with the energy, passion, creativity and strength in communities and build from there.

This puts the third sector in a pivotal position because it is the way communities organise, express collective concerns and give people the confidence and skills to challenge, and create change.

Co-production without the 'co' is meaningless rhetoric.

The Williams Commission has made one half of the co-production cake, but it hasn't moved beyond the existing comfort zone of the public sector.

What we now need is a People's Commission starting with the same diagnosis, but coming up with recommendations which spell out how to put people at the centre.

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