

Cambridge Centre
for Housing &
Planning Research

Evaluating the Public Health Outcomes of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits Project

Working paper 3

Introduction to co-production in
services: summary report

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March 2016

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To cite this paper:

Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2016) Introduction to co-production in services: summary report. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

1 The evaluation

The Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES) enables people who are introducing innovative public health initiatives to work in partnership with the National Institute for Health Research School for Public Health Research (NIHR SPHR) to conduct rigorous evaluations of their effectiveness. This scheme is particularly focused on local initiatives.

The aim of the evaluation of the public health outcomes of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits project in Wisbech is to determine its potential to tackle social exclusion, loneliness and deprivation and to assess the extent to which it can reduce health inequalities. The Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR) is carrying out this research in collaboration with the Cambridgeshire County Council Community Engagement Team, Spice, and the Cambridge Institute of Public Health (CIPH).

The research uses a mixed methods approach that engages service users, practitioners and policy makers through interviews, surveys, focus groups and ethnographic research methods. One of the key research objectives is to analyse how this type of project can best secure positive health outcomes and how it could be sustainably established in other localities, should these benefits be demonstrated.

This report summarises the concept of co-production, which is central to the Spice Time Credits ethos, and gives an overview of the opportunities and challenges of co-production in service provision.

The first Working Paper provided an overview of time banking and Time Credits, how they work, the benefits associated with time banking and Time Credits, and their key characteristics and core values¹.

For more information about the evaluation please contact Dr Gemma Burgess on glb36@cam.ac.uk or 01223 764547.

This study was funded by the National Institute for Health Research's School for Public Health Research (NIHR SPHR): sphr.nihr.ac.uk.

¹ <http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2015/Evaluating-Public-Health-Outcomes-Cambridgeshire-Time-Credits-Project>

2 What is co-production?

The concept of co-production was originally developed to describe the involvement of ordinary citizens in the production of public services (Pestoff, 2006: 17). In very general terms, **co-production means working together for an agreed outcome.**

In its narrowest sense, co-production is defined as joint working of professionals and individual service users as equals in the delivery of public sector services (Verschuere, 2012). The most inclusive definition for co-production places no restrictions on the nature or character of the involved parties or the activities, as long as a certain degree of collaboration and interaction are present.

Co-production may be best described by its underlying principles and values of mutuality, reciprocity and equality (Boyle, 2003; Boyle et al, 2006; Boyle and Harris, 2009; Scottish Government, 2011).

2.1 'Types' of co-production

Over the years, commentators have tried to 'typify' co-productive practices in various ways. Brudney and England (1983) identify three broad types of co-productive activities: individual, group and collective.

Individual co-production takes place in situations where an individual collaborates with authorities or public sector service providers to generate positive outcomes, for example, by assisting the police in criminal investigations, or adhering to a prescribed treatment regimen. This type of co-production can have a significant positive impact on the service effectiveness and outcomes, although the benefits tend to be largely personal, with minimal aggregate benefits to the service provider, the community or broader society.

Group co-production refers to a situation where people join together to improve their services or environment, for example, by setting up a neighbourhood watch group. It involves groups of citizens working together with service providers in an organised manner to achieve a desired outcome. The benefits of group-co-production may extend to other local people who are not directly involved in the co-production activity itself.

Collective forms of co-production typically involve an active interest on the part of the public sector service providers to engage citizens in the delivery of public services that deliver collective benefits to the wider community. These initiatives tend to emerge when financial pressures force officials to consider alternative service delivery arrangements. Collective forms of co-production are often regarded as most effective, as the benefits tend to be widespread across different segments of the community.

3 Co-production in services

In relation to services, the term co-production is typically used to refer to a situation where **professional services are designed, developed and/or delivered *with or by people, instead of for them*** (for example, see Needham and Carr, 2009).

In recent years, the concept of co-production has been widely adopted to refer to the organised involvement of citizens in the production of public services – a practice that has become increasingly regarded as essential for sustaining the current levels of service provision in the changing economic context (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006; Pestoff, 2006) (Pestoff, 2006).

It puts emphasis on citizen involvement alongside professionals, and concerns people who use the services, i.e. service users themselves rather than ‘traditional’ volunteers (Verschuere et al, 2012). By actively participating in the delivery of the services they receive, service users gain at least partial control of the service agenda, but also assume responsibility (Burdney and England, 1983).

In health and social services, for example, service user co-production can enable service providers to tap into their clients’ non-financial assets - including skills, experiences and ability to provide mutual support - to help improve these services (Needham and Carr, 2009). The UK government has committed itself to enabling people who use services to assume a more collaborative role in the provision of these services as part of a personalisation agenda (Needham and Carr, 2009).

Co-production can take many different forms. Some examples of co-production include resident-led neighbourhood watch groups working together with the police and local authorities to tackle antisocial behaviour and raise vigilance against crime (Bovaird, 2007), parents and professionals working together to provide childcare and youth services (Pestoff, 2006) and health and social care service users taking an active role in the recruitment and training of professional and managers (Needham and Carr, 2009).

3.1 Benefits of co-production

There is widespread acknowledgement of the benefits of co-production - such as its potential to improve service quality, responsiveness to customer needs and client satisfaction. It is widely believed that the implementation of co-productive practices in public sector service provision can not only help to improve the quality of these services, but can also make them more responsive and cost-effective (Boyle and Harris, 2012; Brudney and England, 1983; Pestoff, 2006).

Boyle and Harris (2009) see co-production as a way for the public to influence the design and delivery of public sector services. By utilising the wisdom and experience of the service users and focusing on what individuals, groups and communities can contribute (as opposed to their needs), co-production will bring in extra resources and produce more effective outcomes, making services more cost-effective in the long run (Boyle and Harris, 2012). A pilot project of co-producing local housing strategies in Scotland suggested that, by incorporating the local service-user views to the development of housing strategies, co-

production can make services more cost-effective by making it possible for the service providers to identify unwanted services and reduce spending on these (Scottish Government, 2011).

In recent years, co-production has begun to be seen not only as good practice, but essential to successful public sector service delivery (Alford, 1998; Needham and Carr, 2009; Pestoff, 2006). Especially in the field of health and social care, co-production can help to shift the balance of power, resources and responsibility from professionals to individuals, leading to greater satisfaction with and support for public services (Boyle and Harris, 2012; Brudney and England, 1983; Pestoff, 2006). As a result, co-production is believed to help reduce demand, and effectively provide a solution to the current public sector service crisis (Boyle and Harris, 2012). There is considerable evidence of radical service improvement taking place at the local level as a result of co-productive practices (Bovaird, 2007).

Co-production may also help to tackle the underlying causes of social problems and socioeconomic inequalities, which currently fuel the demand for many public sector services. Services that are delivered in a co-productive way “are likely to be more participative....as well as more equitable, responsive and creatively designed and delivered” (Boyle and Harris, 2012: 17).

3.2 Challenges to co-production

Successful co-production depends on the citizens' willingness to take action and to participate, as well as the opportunities available for them to do so (Marschall, 2004; Pestoff, 2006). In the co-production of local public goods, this citizen involvement may need to be ongoing (Marschall, 2004). In order to make a positive contribution, citizens must be adequately informed about the local public services, the different factors that may affect the availability of these services, and the duties and responsibilities expected of them (Marschall, 2004).

For co-production to work in practice, frontline staff need to be able and confident to share power and accept user expertise (Brudney and England, 1983; Needham and Carr, 2009). This requires public sector workers and professionals to change the way they understand their roles, and how they relate to those they are traditionally used to thinking of as 'clients', 'patients' or 'service users'. In most instances this necessitates some major changes in attitudes, training and priorities, and a re-conceptualisation of one's role as 'facilitator' rather than a 'fixer' (Boyle and Harris, 2012; Needham and Carr, 2009).

It may require considerable mobilisation and recruitment to get people involved (Alford, 1998). As a result, the implementation of co-productive approaches and practices can be time-consuming and costly. It can take a long time to recruit members, to arrange relevant training for all involved parties, to establish clear management structures and leadership, and to get activities started (Boyle and Harris, 2012; Scottish Government, 2011). In many instances, co-production calls for up-front investment in capital goods (Asquer, 2012), while the cost-savings associated with co-productive service delivery tend to become evident only in the long term, as the effectiveness gains materialise and the demand for services declines (Boyle and Harris, 2012). This does not sit well with the mainstream public service efficiency

agenda, which tends to focus on the need to reduce costs in the short term (Boyle and Harris, 2012).

In order to create the necessary conditions for co-production, it will be necessary for services to involve their users in a more equal capacity in building mutual networks, instead of focusing on processes, targets and rigid standards in a manner typical of prevailing practices (Boyle and Harris, 2012). This may entail fundamental reshaping of the way public services are designed, commissioned, organised and delivered (Boyle and Harris, 2012; Needham and Carr, 2009).

One risk associated with co-production in service provision is its potential to further marginalise disadvantaged groups, as “wealthier, better-educated, or non-minority citizens may be more willing or able to engage in co-production activities” (Rosentraub and Sharp, 1981: 517, cited in Brudney and England, 1983: 64).

From the viewpoint of the paid professionals, it is important for the involvement of the public in the co-production of public services to be regarded as a complement to professional public providers or these services, not as an alternative to it (Pestoff, 2006). The limits to the scope for people to co-produce must be recognised and acknowledged (Needham and Carr, 2009), as does the fact that citizens often lack the necessary training and experience required to perform services requiring specialised skills and qualifications (Pestoff, 2006). Even where skills and qualifications are not an issue, substituting paid staff with service users or volunteers would mean transference of the costs of to the co-producers, not an elimination of these costs. Replacing paid workers with ‘volunteers’ would be morally and ethically questionable (Ibid).

4 Spice Time Credits as a tool for co-production

Spice's understanding of co-production builds on the co-operative, egalitarian 'core values' they share with the time banking movement. These include:

- Inclusion and recognition of people as assets: everyone has something to give, and everyone's contribution is welcomed.
- Redefinition of work to include the typically unpaid 'core economy' work in the neighbourhood and community: everyday skills are valuable and needed in the development of sustainable social development.
- Equality and reciprocity: everyone's contribution is valued equally. One hour of time given always equals one Time Credit, regardless of the level of skill required or the type of task.
- Community and social capital: Time Credits seek to provide the framework for the development of supportive and secure social networks.

(Boyle and Bird, 2014; Bretherton and Pleace 2014; NEF, 2001; Weaver et al, 2015)

Time Credits were developed as a tool for building stronger communities and co-produced services where people are active and equal participants. The Time Credits model seeks to encourage co-production at individual, group and community level. Through Time Credits, people are encouraged to get involved in their community, to make decisions about how services are run, and to help create and actively deliver services alongside professionals.

The Spice model allows each participant organisation or a group to make their own decisions about how they use Time Credits to encourage co-production within their organisation. By supporting co-production within groups, organisations and communities, Time Credits help to reduce dependency, aid prevention, and build individual self-esteem and community resilience. Participant engagement can help organisations to serve more clients, or to help improve the quality or range of services they provide. As a result, Time Credits can help make services and activities more cost-effective, as service users and their communities increasingly help to design and deliver services and outcomes (Apteligen, 2015).

The definition of co-production which underpins the Spice theory of change is that of Boyle and Harris (2009). The authors define co-production as:

"...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" (p. 11, quoted in Apteligen, 2014).

Although not a precondition for participation, many Spice partners recruit a significant proportion of their volunteers from groups of service users, such as the parents of school-aged children, residents at a homeless hostel, or members of a credit union. This often involves people who would not normally volunteer to give time. Involvement from the

individuals' part is always voluntary and requires active behaviour (people actively 'giving' their time) to generate a positive outcome and participate in delivering an activity or service.

5 Conclusions

Within the last decade or so, there has been a growing movement to encourage more interactive and collaborative practices in service delivery. The concept of co-production has emerged as a response to these demands, to describe practices that involve various actors, often from different social or professional positions, working together interactively. In the coming years, the demand for these types of inclusive and participatory practices is likely to increase further. In very general terms, co-production means people working together for an agreed outcome.

In relation to services, the term co-production is typically used to refer to a situation where professional services are designed, developed and/or delivered with or by people, instead of for them. Co-production is seen as means of enhancing both the quality and quantity of services. In particular, co-production in services has been linked to improvements in the quality of services, customer satisfaction, responsiveness and outcomes, efficiency, cost-efficiency and socio-economic inequalities.

Co-production may also help to tackle the underlying causes of social problems and socio-economic inequalities, which can fuel demand for public sector services. Services that are delivered in a co-productive way are likely to be more participative, more equitable, responsive and creatively designed and delivered. In order for co-production in service delivery to be effective and successful, a set of preconditions must be met. These include citizens' willingness to contribute their time and effort, staff's commitment and willingness to engage and the time and capital resources to design and develop co-productive services.

The Spice Time Credits model seeks to encourage co-production at individual, group and community levels. Through Time Credits, people are encouraged to get involved in their community, to make decisions about how services are run, and to help create and actively deliver services alongside professionals.

Co-production may be best described by its underlying principles and values of mutuality, reciprocity and equality. The aim of the evaluation is to embed this co-productive approach within the research as far as possible and to reflect on the success of this approach as the research progresses.

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