



# Paper

## From consultation to co-production: high-involvement change

IES Perspectives on HR 2016

Valerie Garrow, IES Principal Associate

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*'Often change need not be cajoled or coerced. Instead it can be unleashed.'*

S Kelman, 2005

High-involvement work practices have featured in management research and literature for decades but when it comes to organisational change, people still tend to feel 'done to'. This might be because change is often happening in crisis mode when things need to happen quickly and control is centralised. There is usually some form of consultation but little real involvement in the design and development of structures and processes that will impact people's working lives.

During a recent interview a senior NHS manager told me that she had finally come to understand the real difference between consultation and 'co-production'. The latter involves removing barriers (both physical and perceived) to participation, ensuring everyone has a voice and genuinely listening to and working with those voices. But it is easy to pay lip service to staff/patient/service user involvement.

Co-production is firmly on the agenda for bringing about change in the delivery of public services, particularly in healthcare where genuine patient-centred care has to involve service users and their carers as well as key stakeholders such as GPs, the wider community, and social workers and other health professionals. The achievement of genuine co-production, however, requires a fundamental change of mindset, particularly for leaders and managers.

## What is co-production?

According to '1000 Lives Plus', a national improvement programme supporting organisations and individuals involved in delivering healthcare for Wales:

*Co-production encourages participation, mutuality and respect for others, valuing the experience, skills and knowledge that each participant brings and providing opportunities to extend their skills and knowledge. It aims to change 'traditional relationships of power, control and expertise' ...this is quite different to other engagement activities.*

Spencer et al (2014)

Co-production encompasses co-design, co-delivery and co-evaluation and stakeholders are involved from the word go. It goes beyond 'buy-in', 'consultation' or 'good communication' and incurs shared responsibility for outcomes, so that while everyone does not necessarily agree with everything, the process allows for debate and democratic decision-making.

Two recent case study-based reports from IES have documented some examples that illustrate the potential of high-involvement organisational change. Both feature the work of the Organisation Development and Design Expert Service (OD&D Service), a small

cross-Government service that supports departments going through complex organisational change.

## Co-creation in organisation design

The first report (Garrow, 2013) draws on a short case story from the Treasury Solicitor's Department (TSol) who had asked the OD&D Service to support them with plans to integrate the majority of legal services into a single organisation that would almost double in size. It required the merger of different legal teams and cultures and the creation of a new brand and identity to reflect the best of the individual departments. It was decided from the start to involve staff in shaping the new organisation and the design was based on the principle of 'co-creation'.

An initial diagnostic phase, involving 1:1 interviews, provided the opportunity for wide stakeholder involvement and the chance to surface feelings and concerns anonymously. Themes from the interviews were aggregated to paint a vivid picture of perceptions and assumptions and, although previously unvoiced, it became apparent that many concerns were shared. For example, it was widely believed that the merger was a TSol 'takeover' and the diagnostics phase was seen as helpful in diffusing some of the resistance.

Co-creation can feel uncomfortable because the outcome is unknown at the start and to help clients work with this ambiguity the OD&D Service is clear that there are parameters and boundaries within which people can influence change. Senior leaders are therefore encouraged to be clear about where 'the red lines' are. At TSol, people initially couldn't see how the organisation would be different, so a new strategic aim was produced collectively, from which eight design principles were agreed by the senior leadership team. Giving people the ability to articulate what they felt the organisation should be about had a significant impact in providing direction.

Collaboration and co-creation might appear to be a slow process where there are multiple stakeholders but the OD&D Service consultants found ways to maintain steady progress while retaining the participative principles. For example, by the design stage, there was greater trust to allow small groups to work on strategy, design principles and benefits on behalf of colleagues, reporting back on findings and recommendations. Confidence in the process was cited as one of the key benefits of working with the OD&D Service team and, while not everyone agreed with everything, the co-creation process gave a sense of structure and an opportunity for people to feel they had been heard.

## Unleashing the energy for change at UKVI

The second report (Garrow, 2015) focuses on UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and is an excellent illustration of where you might start to genuinely engage people in change in a very large organisation where there is a legacy of blame and a loss of confidence. In a

challenging political and economic environment UKVI remains constantly in the public eye.

In this case the methodology adopted was Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which amplifies what is working well rather than focusing on fixing problems, thereby generating positive energy for change. In a climate that had been characterised by blame, a core team of eighteen individuals from across the organisational hierarchy were trained in AI interviewing techniques and went out into the organisation to collect 120 'high point' stories about when people felt at their best. An analysis of the common themes in the stories produced several 'root causes' of success.

### The root causes of success at UKVI



Armed with these 'root causes' of success, the core team reached out to new audiences, presenting findings, producing literature and putting up notice boards and displays. They found the stories resonated with colleagues across the organisation and people readily identified with the root causes of success.

A wider audience of 120 people accepted an open invitation to a large scale event (the Summit) to share more stories and focus on 'what we want more of' in order to meet future challenges. Using the four-stage AI process of Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny, the team used the root causes of success to plan and mobilise for action.

## Positive Action Groups

The Summit closed with an invitation for people to join Positive Action Groups (PAGs) to work on issues that were important to them, making changes at a local level. These groups were run by staff on a collaborative basis with their peers, and participants identified the issues that they wanted to take forward in their own locations and across geographical and departmental boundaries.

One PAG, for example, took up the root cause of *joining up and working together*. The project team, which included staff from both UKVI and HMPO, set out to improve the services offered by both organisations when interviewing clients, whether they were applying for leave to remain in the UK, or a British passport. Working together they designed a twelve-week pilot which, during that time, was able to deliver: hundreds of additional interviews; a 35 per cent reduction in appointment duration; a 50 per cent increase in the volume of interviews conducted per day; increases in the number of applications meeting the 20-day service level agreement and an enhanced customer experience with 90 per cent of UKVI customers rating their interview experience as positive.

The successful pilot also trialled the use of digitisation in interviewing, which had been a development ambition. The project was nominated in the 'working together' category in this year's Home Office Excellence Awards and illustrates genuine co-production in practice.

## The impact of high involvement

At the time of writing *UKVI: Facing into Change*, there were already many benefits emerging from the AI initiative.

### For individuals

- People engaged in the AI process were feeling more positive.
- They found it refreshing to have their hard work and successes acknowledged.
- Evidence from the stories and interviews suggested that the movement was winning hearts and minds.

### For teams

- Team meetings were more positive, identifying new ways to bring about improvements and raise productivity.

- There was an increased sense of pride and new ways introduced to acknowledge and celebrate success.
- It was easier to talk about change.

### **At the organisational level**

- There was a sense of engagement where AI has been introduced.
- AI had provided opportunities to create trust between managers and staff that it was 'OK to collaborate and think outside the box'.
- More people were talking positively about Continuous Improvement (an existing change initiative).
- People were spotting and taking forward opportunities for improvement.
- There were examples of collaboration across teams and building networks to improve efficiency and productivity.
- It had provided an opportunity for talent spotting, giving individuals who may not otherwise have had it, the opportunity to be leaders of change.
- PAGs were demonstrating a bottom-up approach to change.

### **Some of the challenges of high involvement**

So why are all organisations not reaping the benefits of 'co-production'? Directors at UKVI expressed surprise at the thirst for it and the strength of passion, and engagement scores are already improving.

#### **Top-level support**

One reason already mentioned above is that genuine co-production means that outcomes are not known in advance. Not all leaders are comfortable with the ambiguity of 'unleashing' change that might go in an unpredictable direction. It requires a good deal of trust and shared values to make it work.

Even with solid top-level support, middle managers are a key group whose support is vital. Bottom-up change requires a willingness to loosen, and in some cases let go of, the reins in order to support fledgling ideas and projects, allowing time for staff to meet and plan.

One of the strengths of the movement at UKVI, a traditionally hierarchical institution, was the lack of importance of grades, with junior people on the core team having access to and influencing the Board.

## Participative structures and processes

Bottom-up change is likely to stray into established territory! For example, at UKVI, one of the PAG groups chose to work on the appraisal system and how staff could be engaged and appreciated more. This meant that HR had to be on board to support but also to establish boundaries.

The organisational architecture has to be flexible to support bottom-up change. That might mean new types of communication, flexibility in integrating other change programmes, and new forums and networks for the sharing of ideas.

## Spread and sustainability

IES summarised the UKVI case story with an evaluative summary, mapping the initiative against the IES social movement model (Garrow et al, 2010). The success of social movements depends on their ability to attract and mobilise support until a 'tipping point' is reached where change becomes the new normal. Along the way there are various pitfalls: being seen at the outset as orchestrated from the top; sparking interest but lacking any invitation or opportunity to get involved; mobilising people to action but lacking organisation, thus leading to negative outcomes, disillusionment and even conflict.

If a social movement does not expand and relies on the original core activists, it is at risk when those people move on. It can also soon feel elitist so that it deters rather than promotes involvement. New blood and fresh ideas are vital to propel the movement forward.

## Finally...

High-involvement change brings huge benefits accompanied by big challenges to leaders who have to balance providing sufficient direction and structure in order to avoid anarchy, with the 'unleashing' of creativity and passion. For other stakeholders, co-production brings rights and responsibilities for the outcomes of change but it is easier to live with both mistakes and successes that one has had a hand in designing and implementing.

## References

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- Spencer M, Dineen R, Philips A (2014), *Co-producing Services - Co-creating Health*, 1000 Lives Improvement

## More on this topic

To find out more about the ideas in this article or how IES can help you, please contact:

Valerie Garrow, Principal Associate  
valerie.garrow@employment-studies.co.uk

### Workshop

#### **High involvement change: from consultation to co-production** **Thursday, 7 April 2016, London**

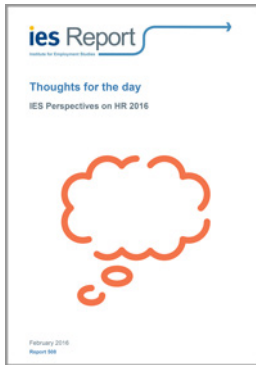
The management of change often receives rock-bottom ratings in the employee survey, with employees complaining that their voices are not being heard. There is evidence that paying lip-service to consultations is demotivating and promotes mistrust rather than involvement. HR and change practitioners, on the other hand, feel frustrated that people are quick to criticise but slow to get involved.

How can this no-win situation be transformed, so that employees feel genuinely involved and participate willingly and creatively in offering ideas and bringing about change?

This event will be facilitated by Valerie Garrow and Dilys Robinson.

To find out more and book a place, visit [www.employment-studies.co.uk/events](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/events)





This article is from the IES report: *Thoughts for the day: IES Perspectives on HR 2016*. (IES Report 508, 2016).

The full report is available online at:  
[www.employment-studies.co.uk/hr2016](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/hr2016)

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Whatever your professional and HR needs, get in touch:

T: 01273 763400

E: [emma.knight@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:emma.knight@employment-studies.co.uk)