

Co-design in the public sector

✓ 10 TOP TIPS

INTRODUCTION:

Co-design... it's in our DNA

Co-design is not a new term. Increasing numbers of public sector colleagues are embracing it as an approach to designing services, recognising that the understanding of a problem and the solution can be improved if staff, providers and customer all look at it together. But co-design is not easy. It's a way of approaching the design process that can bring about additional challenges and problems. However, done well there are big wins to be had.

iMPower takes a co-design approach to all of our work with clients. It's in the DNA of how we do what we do and we've learnt many lessons along the way. Having worked on hundreds of projects across local government and the health sector - from children's services to models of care - here's our own '10 top tips' that have helped us to change behaviours, re-design systems and improve outcomes.

1. Make sure co-design means co-design

Co-design is an easy phrase to use and can often be synonymous with 'stakeholder engagement', 'communication' and 'consultation'. But co-design is none of these; **it is a participatory approach to an existing design process whereby all participants are equal partners.**

2. Co-design with the right people

Co-design needs planning; it will not happen organically. Think about who across the system needs to be involved. Users are central to the purpose of a service. Frontline staff are key players. Partners and providers also need to be involved and will have a role to play. Services are inter-connected and impact on each other so the remit needs to go wider than the service itself.

Think carefully about the people who need to be in the room i.e. who really knows how the service works and can share the insights needed.

} Co-design has many • forms

There will be at least one, if not more, occasions where it is necessary to get everyone in the same room. This is where collectively you can start to define the problem and work your way towards a solution (and use post-it notes, of course).

However, there will be a range of co-design activities that will take place throughout the design process which will not need to involve everyone every time. Therefore think about what information you need and when; the areas you need to focus on and how to feed that back into the design process.

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• Give (and ask for) constant input

Not all stakeholders will need to be involved with everything but it is important to keep everyone in the loop with what's going on. Being iterative is part of the design process and when co-designing, everyone should feel like they are equal partners of that process and have opportunities to have a say in how the service is designed.



Do not assume the problem you are solving. Do not assume the solution to that problem

- problem

Having an open mind and taking a user-centric approach is bread and butter for any design process. However, this is particularly important when co-designing, as participants will bring a diversity of opinions and experiences. Take these on board but in a way that doesn't lead you towards defining the wrong problem and therefore a solution that isn't going to work. It may take several attempts to pinpoint exactly what it is you are trying to solve (or often for iMPOWER, what behaviours you are trying to change). However, you do need to facilitate the discussions (this is often iMPOWER's role when we work with clients); a blank sheet can be daunting for everyone.

6. Co-design as peers (everyone is equal)

We have found that one of the reasons why some organisations are reluctant to embrace co-design is that it removes all hierarchies and job titles. Everyone's opinion is equal and important and sadly, this can go against the grain with how some managers run their organisations. Some managers are also worried that involving staff and customers in the design process means they'll demand things that cannot be provided. However, co-design produces the opposite result as it creates a shared understanding of the existing service, enables people to view the issues from everyone else's perspective and results in an effective design that works well for customers, frontline staff and the organisation.

]. Co-design empowers • staff and citizens

Because you are co-designing with peers, regardless of whether they are junior or senior, provider or service users, it can be an incredibly empowering process. Rather than being presented with a set of options and being asked for their views, customers, staff and providers work alongside each other to discuss and shape what a service could look like. The people that matter have been involved in designing the change that they want to see that will make their lives better.



• Co-design requires simplicity

The design process should be simple to enable everyone to engage equally. Co-design sessions involve methods that allow everyone to easily share their expertise and experience to understand the current service, and be actively involved in creating possible solutions. In co-design the focus is on visual materials, story-telling and prototyping, rather than formal interviews or responses to large reports.



- The impact you want to have is more likely to actually happen (staff and users own the change)

The new service or process you design will be sustainable because those who designed it are invested in it. They own the change. The benefit of this is that the solution is more likely to be right first time, and as people feel committed to the change, they will be motivated to transition well and quickly to the new way of working or experiencing the service when it is implemented.

And finally...

(DRUM ROLL)

10.

Co-designing is an opportunity to change the relationship between the citizen and the state

This is why iMPower takes a co-design approach to everything we do. For public services to be sustainable and deliver better outcomes, we need to start changing the nature of the relationships between citizens and those services; between staff and their organisations; and across institutions in the public, private and third sectors. Co-design empowers people, putting citizens at the centre of design and delivery. It is a way of starting to rethink and reimagine the nature of those relationships within service systems, and more broadly the nature of future public services.

For more information about the work that we do, please visit www.impower.co.uk or get in touch on the contact details below:

enquiries@impower.co.uk

T: 020 7017 8030

@iMPOWERCONSULT

iMPOWER Consulting

112-114 Middlesex Street

London E1 7HY