The Spectrum of Participation Explained

Why all involvement is not co-production- and that's a good thing!

Organisations and individuals are increasingly driven by an understanding that people using health and care services have vital insights and ideas to offer, to improve the way those services work. Peoplehub's approach to enabling change is collaborative and constructive, bringing together people who use services, and people who provide services. Over many years of facilitating developmental change, we realised that when people with lived experience of long-term health conditions and disabilities work with organisations to help inform improvements, there are often crossed assumptions. This can lead to misunderstandings, deadlock and frustration. We've developed an approach to participation which untangles those misunderstandings.

Co-production is understood by different people in various, and sometimes contradictory, ways. Organisations and service providers often engage with the people who use their services, with limited success, despite good intentions. Many times, we've heard from staff: "We tried user involvement, and it didn't work…" or from people with lived experience: "They said they wanted to co-produce, but really they were just ticking boxes". This led us to explore what was happening in the relationships between organisations and people who were being invited to get involved.

Why a new model?

Peoplehub's combined knowledge and experience of amplifying the voices and influence of people with lived experience spans many decades. There have been several illustrations and approaches used to describe different types of participation over the last 50 to 60 years.

One much cited example is the Ladder of Citizen Participation, developed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. Arnstein's ladder describes different levels of citizen involvement in the United States. In health and social care in the UK, Think Local, Act Personal (TLAP) has adapted Arnstein's ladder into the "Ladder of Co-production".

Ladder images imply that the lower rungs are of less value than the top rungs and has led to beliefs that only "full co-production" is good enough. Often, the ladder rungs are perceived as "steps towards" co-production, rather than useful ways of working together in their own right. We do not think this is helpful, or realistic.

Peoplehub fully endorses the movement of power and decision-making closer to the people most affected by the decisions which impact their lives. However, in our opinion, a broad range of participation methods can be valuable and effective in different circumstances and contexts.

For any participation to be effective, it is essential to clarify expectations between everyone involved.

We therefore set out to find a non-hierarchical way of illustrating the different ways that organisations can involve people in decision making. Our Spectrum of Participation emerged from this thinking.

How is the Spectrum different?

The Spectrum differs from previous models because it provides:

- A non-hierarchical visual representation
- Positive valuing of each function
- Clarity of function for each type of participation
- Questions to identify the level of influence offered in decision-making.

It's a spectrum because it moves between doing "TO" people and doing "WITH" people, and because each element has its own distinct purpose and value. Each type of interaction has different functions and is useful in different circumstances. No matter which type of participation is offered, enabling meaningful input requires clarity of roles and relationships.

This means it's vital that organisations understand and can identify how much influence people with lived experience will have within the decision-making process. Everyone involved needs to know what's open to change, and what isn't.

We set out to describe the key questions that pinpoint what an organisation seeks to have answered through each type of participation. People have told us that the questions are useful to help them identify which type of participation will be most appropriate for what they want to achieve.



In our Spectrum, we deliberately chose not to include the "Manipulation" and "Citizen Control" rungs, which feature respectively at the bottom and top of Arnstein's ladder. This is because they represent the extremes of no power or full power. Arnstein's ladder describes different levels of governmental/citizen **power and control**, whereas the Spectrum describes the different **interactions** between organisations and people, and the degree of **influence** in decision making.

Participation is about organisations working with people in a range of ways, with the intention of enabling people to inform and influence decision-making. We start our Spectrum with Informing, as the furthest point of "doing to" people on the left side of the Spectrum. Informing is the minimal amount of interaction in the relationships between organisations and people. It could be argued that Informing is not a type of participation, however, it is an interaction, and it is many people's only experience in their relationships with organisations and services.



Inform (Telling)
The Spectrum starts with a statement rather than a question: "*This is what is happening*". This is because the organisation is simply telling people of a decision that has already been made. It is a one-way relationship, with no expectation or opportunity for a response. However, through the information being shared with them, people are better informed, and information is a form of power. Information sharing can happen fairly easily across large populations.



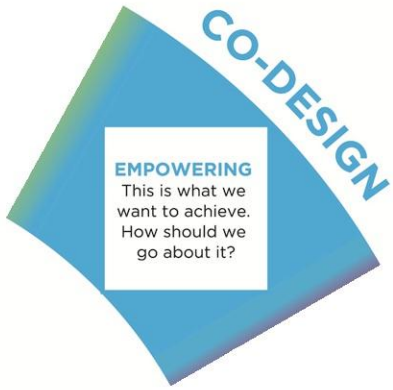
Educate (Explaining)
The organisation explains a decision that has already been made: "*This is what is happening and why. Do you understand?*". The organisation takes the time to interact with people to ensure they understand why the decision has been reached and the impact on them. There is a minimal relationship with no opportunity to debate the decision. Education can happen across large populations.



Consult (Asking)
The organisation is asking people for a yes or no answer on a decision that has to be made: "*This is what is happening and why. Do you agree or disagree?"* When done well, the organisation takes the time to lay out the potential positives and negatives of the yes or no answer. There is likely to be opportunity to influence the outcome of the decision. A limited relationship exists because the purpose is often to try to reach as many people as possible. Consultation is about breadth rather than depth of participation.



Engage (Connecting)
The organisation wants to connect more deeply with people and gather opinions and ideas on a decision rather than just seeking a yes or no answer.: "*This is what might happen. What do you think about it?*" People's input will be influential in the decision because the organisation starts from a more open position, with an open question. There is an emerging relationship. The organisation is likely to reach out to a smaller group of people (than when consulting), so that they can collate and respond to more in-depth feedback and opinions.



Co-design (Involving)
The organisation involves people in deciding with them how best to achieve an objective which has already been set: "*This is what we want to achieve. How should we go about it?"* Since the discussion and input is about the process of implementing something, this will necessarily involve people influencing multiple decisions over a period of time. People move from passive recipients to active participants. Power and decision making begins to be shared in a deeper relationship. For co-design to be efficient and effective, the number of people involved is likely to be a fairly small group.



Co-produce (Collaborating)
The organisation collaborates with people to explore and set priorities and objectives for change, together: "*What are the biggest priorities and how can we work together to achieve them?"* People are participating at a strategic level and are able to influence the use of resources through a collective voice. In order for people to be able to contribute meaningfully at this level, the organisation will need to invest in people's knowledge, skills and confidence. Therefore, this will mean a long-term relationship with a select and consistent group of people. When people and systems value each other's input and

The Spectrum ends with co-production as the furthest point of "doing with" people, on the right side of the Spectrum. Co-production enables the greatest amount of power sharing between organisations and people, in situations where an organisation holds ultimate responsibility for resources and decision making. In our view, co-production between organisations and people with lived experience can never be a completely equal relationship. People's perspectives and input can be valued equally, but the organisation retains overall responsibility and accountability for the decisions being made.

The key factor in determining which type of participation is most suitable is the degree of influence that an organisation can offer to people in decision making.

Working with the Spectrum

We've seen the lightbulb moments that can happen once people understand and begin working with the Spectrum. Being able to identify and explain the level of influence that an organisation is able to offer provides the best starting point.

When staff are confident that the type of participation is appropriate to the level of influence on offer, the pressure to "label" all interactions as co-production is diminished. This enables staff to be more transparent about what is open to change, and what isn't, and reduces confusion and crossed assumptions. It is this transparency and honesty that enables good, effective relationships between people and organisations.

We invite you to explore the Spectrum of Participation in your work with people with lived experience.

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