AWARENESS 4CHANGE

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Training materials

Module V
Awareness Campaigns

EaSI

Module 5.C. - Co-production and engagement of PwD as meaningful and effective methods

Often, when organizations and companies try to engage with PwD, they are not successful either in the short-term (for example, hiring PwD) or in the long-term (for example, helping PwD progressing in their career). This is due to a number of factors, but it can be summed up in the lack of strategies of co-production and engagement with PwD. This unit has the goal to raise awareness to the fact that, only by involving PwD in organizational processes (hiring, training etc.), can companies truly create an inclusive workplace, foster diversity and nurture the careers of PwD. To achieve this goal, this unit will approach: the Social Model of Disability;

1. The Medical Model of Disability vs Social Model of Disability

As an introduction to co-production and engagement of PwD as meaningful and effective tools, it is important to distinguish between the **Medical Model of Disability** and the **Social Model of Disability**, given that it is by aligning their views with the latter that companies can truly involve PwD in the organizational process.

Picture 1 translates these different models into a visual form. As presented:

- The **Medical Model of Disability** sees the individual as the "problem", meaning that it is the individual that has to adapt to the world, and that the world does not need to adapt to the individual. Emphasis is given to the medicalisation and cure of the individual, which implies "disable people as passive receivers of services aimed at cure or management" (Disability Advice Service, 2022).
- The **Social Model of Disability** sees the way the world/society is organized and run as the "problem", meaning that society creates the barriers for PwD to thrive. Therefore, the solution is to reorganize structures and processes in order for them to be **inclusive for everyone.**

Picture 1: The Medical Model of Disability vs Social Model of Disability

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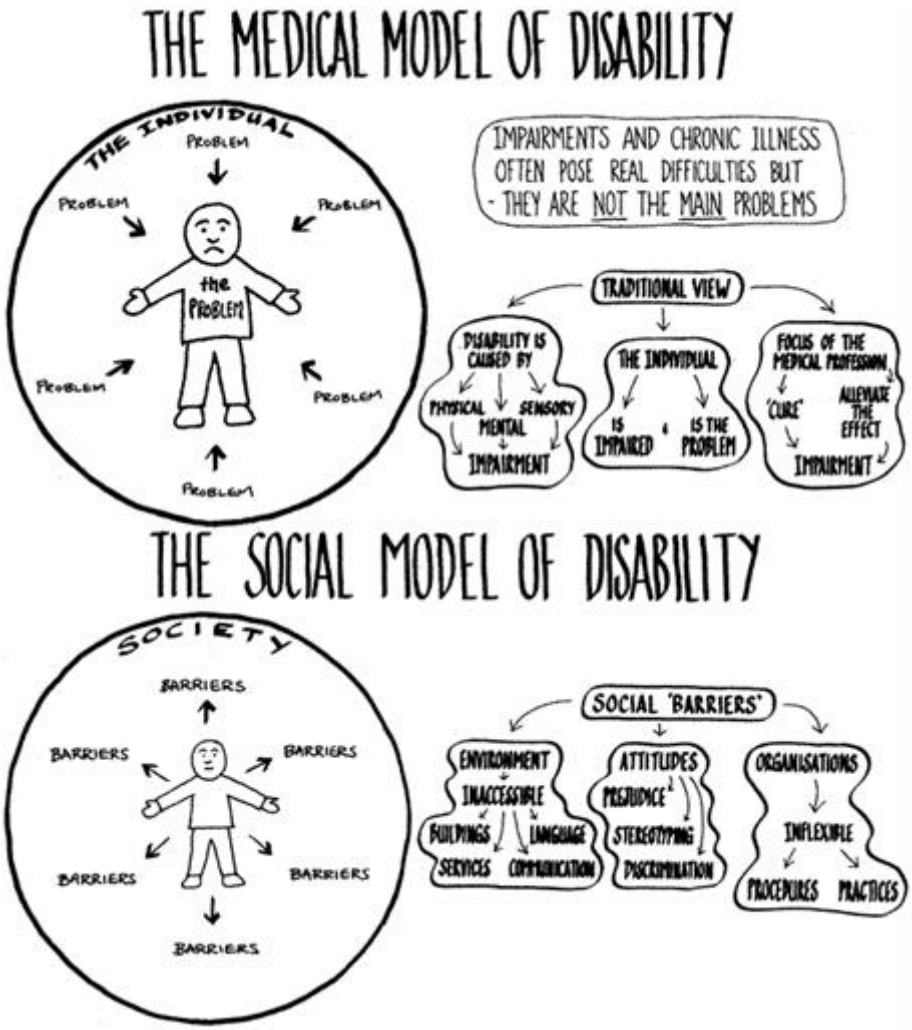

Source: https://www.neurodivercitysg.com/medical-model-vs-social-model.html

One of the most fruitful ways to put the Social Model of Disability in practice in the workplace is by co-producing and, through this, engaging with PwD. Co-Production will be approached in section 3, but to contextualize it, it is first important to address the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) as the base for this change.

2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol (A/RES/61/106) was adopted on **13 December 2006**. It is the result of decades of work by the United Nations to **change attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities**, namely by **changing from the Medical Model of Disability to the Social Model of Disability**.

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In the EU, the convention entered into force on 22 January 2011. All EU Member States have signed and ratified the convention. 22 EU countries have also signed and ratified its optional protocol in January 2019 (European Commision, 2022).

The Convention reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities and identifies areas where adaptations have to be made for persons with disabilities to effectively exercise their rights and areas where their rights have been violated, and where protection of rights must be reinforced (United Nations, 2006).
Article 27 specifically focuses on Work and Employment and recognizes "the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities" (United Nations, 2006).

According to the European European Platform for Rehabilitation (2016):

"*Some of the key principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), such as involvement of people with disabilities, respect for dignity, autonomy and independence, underpin the principles of co-production.*"

3. **Co-Production**
   a. **What is Co-Production**

Co-production is the way to start **reorganizing structures and processes** and to **create a safe space for everyone**.
Co-production is usually defined as:

"*equal partnership and collaboration between service providers and people using services. Co-production is about recognising that people who use services are experts in their own right, rather than passive recipients of care ('clients', 'service users'), and about involving them in the shaping of services.*" (European Platform for Rehabilitation, 2016)

But there is no single definition of co-production; the concept represents a set of values and principles, such as engagement, participation, choice and control, and involvement (Social Care Policy, 2010). In fact it dates back to the 1970s, in the US, as a result of the emergence of movements that were questioning existing power structures, combined with an increased citizen participation in communities. Academics in the USA in the 1970s explored how to harness more effectively the input of people who use services, focusing particularly on municipal services such as waste collection, parking, road maintenance and neighborhood policing (Needham, 2009).
According to Pia Hansen, Coordinator at the Look Ahead Care and Support organization:

"*It is a bit like handing over and going 'Actually we don't know the best way to do this'*" (Social Care Institute of Excellence, 2019)

Co-production is usually applied in community based activities but it can be applied to **any organization that is willing to commit to a full integration of PwD in the workplace.**

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Co-production can be embedded into **all organizational levels** (from senior management to frontline staff) and it entails the involvement of workers as a **routine practice**, instead of a one-off event (European Platform for Rehabilitation, 2016). Further to this, a Co-production approach can be applied at **all stages** of service delivery - in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services (European Platform for Rehabilitation, 2016). It entails the respect for the resources that everyone brings to the table and an emphasis on the outcomes that the ones involved value.
Going back to the relationship between Co-Production and the Social Model of Disability, the European Platform for Rehabilitation (2016) highlights that

"***it is vital that all the stakeholders involved in co production have a good understanding of the social model of disability*** *(...) This will help ensure that the necessary measures are taken to remove these barriers and make the co-production process fully accessible to all*"

Given the below, it is clear that co-production is the most efficient and effective way for organizations to, further than integrating PwD, nurture a culture of cooperation and dialogue. The Social Care Policy (2010), citing the Disability Unit UK, highlights the importance of "ensuring disabled people are involved at all levels, including the strategic, when you are producing your policies or delivering services", which hints directly at co-production.

An important certification at the European level, related to Co-Creation is the EQUASS – European Quality in Social Services.

"The European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) is an initiative of the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR). EQUASS enhances the social sector by engaging social service providers in continuous improvement, learning and development, in order to guarantee service users quality of services throughout Europe."[1]

Organizations that posessed this certification regularly aplly co-creation processes in their daily activities.

b. **Co-production vs Participation, Co-Design and Co-Creation**

There are some other concepts that are similar to co-production in the field of Social Care, such as participation, co-design and co-creation:
- **participation** means <u>being consulted,</u> while a co-production process means that the entervinients are equal partners;
- **co-design** means <u>people who develop services/products/projects usually working with people who are the beneficiaries</u> of these services/products and projects <u>at a specific time</u> of the service/product and project, i.e. at the conception. Therefore, co-design

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might be a part of co-production, but it does not entail all the vicissitudes that co-production entails;
- **co-creation** is the concept that is most similar to co-production but the latter intends to be a transformative tool for how organizations work or, in other words, one of the company values, while the former is more associated with a specific intervention.

c. **Co-Production Principles**

There are four principles inherent to Co-Production (Social Care Institute of Excellence, 2020):

1. **Equality:** everyone involved should contribute and all inputs given should be equally assessed and considered
2. **Diversity:** the more diverse the people involved in co-production, the better the final outcome
3. **Access**: there should be no obstacles stopping people from taking part in co-production
4. **Reciprocity:** people's participation in co-production has to have a final outcome that makes them feel accomplished

d. **Co-Production Levels**

The Social Care Policy (2010), identifies three levels of Co-production:

1. **Compliance**: it is the minimum level of co-production. It implies acknowledging that services cannot be produced without input from users, even if that only means complying with the standard or the status quo. This sort of co-production offers little opportunity for control and change by users.
2. **Recognition and Support:** Co-production can be a way for providers to recognise and support the users, by acknowledging the importance of their input, valuing, supporting and harnessing the power of existing informal support networks and creating better ways for people to shape services. This sort of co-production focuses on improving existing services with the help of users, who are invited to make a greater contribution to the service. However, the emphasis here is on creating mechanisms of support rather than challenging and reforming. Within this model people often still remain critics rather than creators of services.
3. **Transformation**: Only when embracing this last level will organizations be able to truly co-produce. At the transformative level, co-production denotes a profound reform. It is about empowering the users of the product or service, acknowledging that they know best. It involves challenging existing organizational culture and forming new structures of delivery, rather than occasional consultation and involvement which doesn't necessarily result in fundamental change. A set of principles highlights four core values underpinning this co-production approach:
   - **Recognising people as assets**: This involves transforming the perception of people from passive recipients of services and burdens

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on the system into one where they are equal partners in designing and delivering services.

- **Valuing work differently**: Transformational co-production works when each person brings their different views and ways to work to the table.
- **Promoting reciprocity**: This involves offering people a range of incentives to work in reciprocal relationships with each other, where there are mutual responsibilities and expectations.
- **Building social networks**: It is important to develop peer support networks as an effective way of transferring knowledge and supporting change.

e. **Advantages of Co-Production**

The execution of projects in co-production presents the following advantages:

- **not incurring in unnecessary spending**: if projects are co-produced between workers who have a disability and workers who do not have a disability, the results of the project will be tailored to the target group they want to engage with, which might allow for some cost saving and efficiency (OECD, 2011)

For example, imagine an organization that wants to promote a product for people with autism. If they include in the conception of the promotion campaign a worker that has autism, the content might be more in line with the target group and the organization saves money in creating other campaigns.

- **make services and products better**: if more "minds" are used in all stages of the business, this will be translated into better results (OECD, 2011).
- **promote a culture of mutual help:** which, at the end of the day, will benefit every aspect of the organization (OECD, 2011).

For these advantages to be harnessed, employers have to create a work environment that allows workers to co-produce i.e. a work environment that permits that workers have the time and resources to co-create. Next section will approach how to put Co-Production into practice.

f. **How to put Co-Production into practice**

According to the SCIE, there are 4 essential components of a successful co-creation process implementation (2020)[2] - culture, structure, practice and review. It is important to consider all these 4 components due to the fact that only a complete approach will allow organizations to change at several levels (from management to collaborators) and to turn co-production into a recurring practice and not a one-off project.

1. **Culture**

Organisations that want to do co-production have to guarantee that workers know what co-production means, what it entails and what using it can improve their work;

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Furthermore, workers should be prepared to apply this method of getting things done and have a growth mindset, i.e. embrace potential failure as an opportunity to learn.

2. **Structure**

Organisations should have a structure in place that allows for the implementation of co-production. This means flexibility, open communication and time allocated to co-creation processes.

3. **Practice**

Organisations have to guarantee the following to make sure that co-production is put in practice:

- provide training in coproduction and in any other skills that is necessary for the co-production of the project;
- guarantee that the tools and instruments necessary are available for everyone who is part of co-production project;
- guarantee that collaborators have all the relevant information they need to be part of co-production and make choices.

4. **Review**

For the co-production process to be successful, one last step is necessary: accompanying how the work is carried out and assessing the outcomes or impacts that result from it. To do so, organisations should have a set time to do reviews and make sure co-production is meeting the proposed goals; use co-production to do these reviews; make use of the findings to improve future co-production processes.
Example: if you co-create a recruitment process with PwD, access how many more candidates applied and exactly what were the mechanisms in place for this to happen

Further to these four steps, the irish National Disability Authority (2016), has suggested practical methods to encourage the participation in co-production processes, namely:

- Organize focus groups, committees, boards and panels;
- Incorporate co-production in individual work plans;
- Organize meetings and workshops;
- Provide surveys, feedback forms and questionnaires to access the results;
- Audit the results;
- Promote quality improvement activities;
- Provide training;

f) A plus to Co-prodution: Peer Support

Scholars have been studying the importance of Peer Support in organizations, especially when it comes to the transfer of knowledge (Martin, 2010; Salamon et al., 2022). Further to this, peer support in organizations is also beneficial when dealing with problems that affect job performance, such as stress, burnout, or even personal problems (Goth, 2018).

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According to Disability Rights UK (2012), peer support plays a tremendous role in PwD lives, because they have built these support relationships to help them across impairments. If employers can take advantage of this, it may be beneficial to the whole organisation. As explained by testimony provided by the Disability Rights UK (2012), "*Disabled people have the passion and empathy to support others and have learned to come up with creative solutions to the difficulties of everyday life. They see what and how things could improve*".
Peer support encourages the development of an environment supportive of self-initiative and open to new thoughts and ideas, which is essential for the success of Co-Production.

h) Practical Example - Specialistern

Specialisterne Foundation owns Specialisterne Denmark and the Specialisterne concept and trademark. The foundation works to enable one million jobs for people with autism and similar challenges through social entrepreneurship, corporate sector engagement and a global change in mindset.

Picture 2 - Specialistern Talent Program Poster[3]

Source: Specialistern

The company has identified the following problems in the employment process of neurodivergent job seekers:

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- **High unemployment or underemployment rates among neurodivergent persons**

While autistic adults have a desire to work and contribute they are often disadvantaged by traditional recruitment and hiring processes. A United Nations proclamation on World Autism Day 2016 estimated that more than 80% of autistic adults around the world are unemployed.

- **Invisible barriers created by employers**

Recruitment processes, including job descriptions and interview processes, may eliminate neurodivergent job seekers from the selection pool before they have got the chance to showcase their skills and talents. Employers must adapt their recruitment processes to be inclusive towards neurodivergent applicants. There are a number of guidelines to follow to make this happen, with the two most important being:

- Replacing vague job descriptions (e.g. unrealistic expectations, skill requirements outside the scope of the advertised position and unnecessary use of buzz words such as 'great team player' or 'problem solver on an international scale')
- Re-thinking conventional interviews (e.g. asking open ended questions such as 'Where do you see yourself in 10 years?' or judging the candidate based on their body language)

Adapting the recruitment processes to be inclusive is not enough on its own. Employers also need to take certain measures throughout the office space and company culture to ensure that neurodivergent employees thrive.

- **Lack of awareness and social stigma**

World Health Organization (WHO) states that, worldwide, autistic persons are often subject to stigma, discrimination and human rights violations. Globally, access to services and support for autistic persons is inadequate.
Source: The Problem | Specialisterne (specialisternefoundation.com)
Specialisterne works to enable jobs for neurodivergent persons through social entrepreneurship, innovative employment models and a national change in mindset. We believe that it is not the neurodivergent individual who needs to change, but rather the way the labour market is conducted. They work in 13 countries: AUSTRIA, AUSTRALIA, BRAZIL, CANADA, DENMARK, FRANCE, ICELAND, IRELAND, ITALY, MEXICO, NORTHERN IRELAND, SPAIN, USA
Specialisterne uses co-production in all phases of their work: for example, their recruitment processes are designed in collaboration with neurodivergent workers and offer consulting services, with neurodivergent consultants, for companies who want to create a more inclusive workplace. Neurodivergent people are the core of all services offered by the company, be it as a user/client/potential worker or as a provider/worker.

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