

A summary of ‘Personalisation through participation’: A new script for public services.

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This paper seeks to explore how we create more personalised versions of existing public services. The challenge is ‘how do more personalised public services help people to devise their own, bottom-up solutions, which create the public good?’

Personalised public services can have at least five different meanings:

1. Providing people with customer-friendly versions of existing services
2. Giving users more say in services once they have access to them
3. Giving users more direct say in how money is spent on services
4. Making users into co-designers and co-producers of services
5. Enabling self-organisation by society.

The subject is examined under the following headings.

1. How to help Anne

The case of Anne Rhodes, who was born with cerebral palsy, is outlined together with the problems that she has encountered as a user of care services. Her case sums up the key problems with public services. Professionals and providers have the budgets, power and information; users do not.

There are three arguments for improving public services.

- i Public services just need more money
 - ii Users should be set free as consumers, with funds to buy services appropriate to their needs
 - iii Users should be set free as citizens and given a voice in decision-making.
- Public service reform should be user-centred. It should be organised to deliver better solutions for the people who use the services. A new framework is needed to show how personal needs can be taken into account within universal public services. We also need to develop a new process that allows institutions to change as a result of interaction with the people that they serve.

2. Services as scripts

The model that describes the use of services is often based on the way that industrialised goods are produced and consumed. Services should be seen as scripts. All services are delivered according to a script, which directs the parts played by the actors involved. Most improvements in services come from producers and users adopting a new script together and then playing out new and complimentary roles. Increasingly, change comes from users giving themselves new roles and insisting that the producers respond.

3. Better basics

Service scripts need to be simpler, more efficient and responsive. Most people want timely, reliable services. There is vast scope for basic improvements to public services. These would give users a more direct and effective voice and also streamline services. Even these basic improvements involve more than doing the same things faster, with better equipment. Improving the basics may reduce dissatisfaction with poor services without creating satisfaction. To eliminate dissatisfaction you have to do the basics well by providing reliable, timely, competent services. Government has to play a more creative role in this without intruding. They have to marry a top-down with a bottom-up approach. This can only be done by encouraging public service users to become consumers.

4. Consumerised services

Consumer choice is a good thing in markets that trade goods and services where products can be compared and there is a broad range of suppliers. Well-informed consumers make preferences and exercise choice and act as judges of good value. In terms of social care, why shouldn't the user make the choice about what mix of home-based services they want, given the budget available? Good examples exist of organisations that facilitate individual and community-based change which promotes self-determination and full-participation in society for people with disabilities. However, making a reality of choice brings with it many problems and requires far-reaching changes, not least of which are the financial considerations. Consumer choice is a challenge to the power of professionals and providers to allocate resources to services. But the extent to which public services can be driven by consumer choice has its limits. Further extension of choice of the kind that some disabled people enjoy should be a vital component in public service reform. A way must be found to allow users to be treated with respect and consideration when they cannot exercise the sanction of taking their business elsewhere.

5. Citizen-led services

There is good reason why public services should be organised around the priorities of the citizen:

- i Citizens fund their services through taxation
- ii People want good services for everyone
- iii Using a public service is not just a consumer experience.

Users want a good service that is efficient, responsive to their needs and treats them with respect. They want better services, not more meetings at which they can discuss future plans. An approach is required that gives people a direct voice through the way in which everyday services are actually developed and delivered.

6. Personalisation through participation

Personalisation through participation makes the connection between the individual and the collective. It allows users a more direct, informed and creative say in rewriting the script by which the service they use is designed and delivered. A number of steps are usually involved: intimate consultation,

expanded choice, enhanced voice, partnership provision, advocacy, co-production, and funding.

Users should not be dependent on the judgement of professionals, they should be able to question, challenge and deliberate with them. Professionals have to become advisers, advocates, solutions assemblers and brokers. Often their role is to help clients find the best way to solve their problems themselves.

Personalisation only tends to work in services that are face-to-face, based on long-term relationships and which depend on direct engagement between the providers and users. The result of personalisation is that users are more involved, are committed and are likely to take their share of responsibility for ensuring success.

The biggest challenge to personalised services is the impact on inequality. The more that services become personalised, the more public resources will have to be skewed towards the least well off to equalise opportunities. These concerns should strongly influence how personalised services are designed and resourced. With careful design personalised services need not widen inequalities. On the contrary, they could be most valuable for people in most need.

7. The politics of personalisation

A chasm exists between people and large organisations. The gap produces frustration and resentment with private services as much as public ones. Although people often feel close to the individual that delivers their service, they may feel distant from the organisation behind them. The gap between people and institutions is central to the future of the public sector. Public service users should have a voice directly in the service as it is delivered.

Personalised services should bring wider social benefits. However, the state can only create public goods by encouraging them to emerge from within society. Participative approaches to service design and delivery create public value by recasting the relationship between the individual and the collective. In more areas the onus will be on changes to private behaviour that cumulatively create public value.

The main challenge facing government is how to help create public goods in a society with an ethos that prizes individual freedom and wants to be 'bottom-up'.

The key is not just to personalise services but also to move from a situation where the centre controls, initiates, plans, instructs and serves to one where it promotes collaboration, self-evaluation and self-improvement. A state that is committed to protecting private freedom must also continuously shape how people use their freedom in the name of the wider public good.