Citation:
Willis, PA and Gregory, A (2016) Making the road while walking: Co-creation, teaching excellence and university leadership (Stimulus Paper). Project Report. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, London.

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:
https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/3329/

Document Version:
Monograph (Published Version)

© Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

As the publisher of this work, the Leadership Foundation would like to encourage its circulation as widely as possible while retaining the copyright. We have supported the creation of this work as part of our programme of research and innovation and hope that it will be of value to senior leaders, managers, development practitioners and policy makers throughout higher education and beyond.

We are a membership organisation and prioritise our members' access to our reports. However, short summaries of each report are also available online to all.

Permission is granted to reproduce for personal and educational use only. Commercial copying, hiring, lending are prohibited.

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please contact us and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Inspiring Leadership | Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

August **2016** ISBN: 978-1-906627-90-4

Making the road while walking: Co-creation, teaching excellence and university leadership

Stimulus paper

Paul Willis, Principal Researcher, School of Strategy, Marketing and Communication
Leeds Business School, Leeds Beckett University

Anne Gregory, Professor of Corporate Communication
University of Huddersfield

Stimulus Paper Series

The Leadership Foundation is pleased to present this latest series of 'Stimulus Papers' which are intended to inform thinking, choices and decisions at institutional and system levels in UK higher education. The themes addressed fall into different clusters including higher education leadership, business models for higher education, leading the student experience and leadership and equality of opportunity in higher education. We hope these papers will stimulate discussion and debate, as well as giving an insight into some of the new and emerging issues relevant to higher education today.

First published August 2016
Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

Published by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

Registered and operational address:
Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
Peer House
8-14 Verulam Street
London
WC1X 8LZ

info@lfhe.ac.uk
www.lfhe.ac.uk

© Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

As the publisher of this work, the Leadership Foundation would like to encourage its circulation as widely as possible while retaining the copyright. We have supported the creation of this work as part of our programme of research and innovation and hope that it will be of value to senior leaders, managers, development practitioners and policy makers throughout higher education and beyond.

We are a membership organisation and prioritise our members' access to our reports. However, short summaries of each report are also available online to all.

Permission is granted to reproduce for personal and educational use only. Commercial copying, hiring, lending are prohibited.

If you would like to use this work for your own non-commercial personal or educational purposes – for example download, save, perform or distribute it in any format, including translation - you may do so without written permission. Please note that the following will be required:

• The Leadership Foundation and the author(s) are credited

• Our website address www.lfhe.ac.uk is prominently displayed

• The text is not altered and is used in full

• The work is not resold

• A copy of the work or link to its use online is sent to the Leadership Foundation.

You are welcome to ask for permission to use this work for purposes other than those covered above.

ISBN 978-1-906627-90-4

Designed & produced by Smith Creative
www.smith-creative.co.uk

Contents

Executive summary 01

Introduction 03

Co-creation and organisational transformation 04

Rhetoric versus reality 09

Programme 1: NHS 12

Programme 2: Cabinet Office 16

What do the students and employers think of co-creation? 17

Where should leaders begin with co-creation? 20

Co-creation as a wicked problem 27

A 'mental map' for university leaders 29

Conclusion 30

References 31

Acknowledgements 34

Author biographies 35

1
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015)

Executive summary

This stimulus paper was commissioned to inform leadership decision-making on how student engagement in higher education can be enhanced through curriculum co-creation. While drawing on relevant policy and theoretical perspectives, the discussion is underpinned by practical insights generated by our experiences of developing co-created Masters programmes for professional students on behalf of the Cabinet Office and the NHS. This experience enables us to consider the organisational implications of co-creation and to highlight a range of leadership issues relevant to both undergraduate and postgraduate curricula.

A commitment to co-creation is firstly positioned as strategically important to university leaders, given the emphasis in the higher education green paper[1] on teaching excellence and the student experience. It is argued that this context requires higher education institutions (HEIs) to consider transformational rather than incremental pedagogical strategies. The paper not only frames co-creation as a transformational strategy, but highlights its importance as a practical intervention that higher education leaders can initiate, encourage and influence. Although recognising that co-creation will not be appropriate for all programmes, it is suggested that the question leaders should start with is 'why not co-creation?' rather than 'why?'.

While the paper makes the case for co-creation, the challenges surrounding its application are also confronted and discussed. Encouraging an organisational environment in which co-creation can flourish is presented as a complex challenge for university leaders. At the heart of the challenge is the requirement to change the mindset, practices and behaviour of staff, students and other key stakeholders. This observation leads to the conclusion that sustaining co-creation is most usefully framed as a wicked problem for university leaders. Co-creation's 'wickedness' lies less in its technical difficulties and more in the social complexity associated with its delivery. Such challenges may explain why co-creation is often spoken about as a pedagogical strategy at the same time as there is little evidence of implementation.

To help inform an assessment of their institution's existing capacity for co-creation, the paper sets out a list of questions for leaders to consider. To provide further practical guidance, the paper then outlines the process of co-creation we have developed which has the potential to be applied in a range of different contexts. The discussion then shifts to a focus on the most important issues and risks associated with co-creation. These are framed as leadership challenges rather than 'managerial concerns', given that they relate to the fundamental purpose of what universities should offer in their provision and the strategies needed to achieve this. The first substantive issue curriculum co-creation raises for higher education leaders is the speed and extent to which it should become embedded in the working culture of universities. It is suggested that a phased implementation strategy provides an opportunity for the organisation to learn about co-creation through pilot studies, small-scale experimentation and improvisation. At the heart of such learning is the need to confront a cultural and operational clash which generates important implications for university leaders. This is concerned with the

need to balance the requirement for programmes that can be developed quickly and have in-built flexibility, with a legitimate internal agenda that is concerned with processes and monitoring for regulatory purposes. The leadership and governance challenge is how to speed up and de-bureaucratise processes while keeping the rigour. The key question this raises for leaders is whether the institution's programme development is genuinely shaped by purpose or driven by process.

Other issues highlighted in the paper include the importance of stakeholder engagement, employee development and the need for new competencies, the potential vulnerability of staff, new types of roles and process, contract issues and pricing. These and other key discussion points are then brought together at the end of the paper in a 'mental map' for leaders. This is designed to summarise the key characteristics of curriculum co-creation as well as the factors that underpin its successful practice.

2
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Committee (2016)

Introduction

This paper focuses on how student engagement in higher education can be enhanced through curriculum co-creation. It is structured around key theoretical, empirical and practical insights which are designed to inform leadership decision-making in this area. The paper first makes the case for the greater involvement of students, as well as other stakeholders, in curriculum co-creation. Second, it emphasises the importance of co-creation for organisational and programme transformation, while highlighting its relevance to contemporary policy debates. It then explores in more detail what is meant by co-creation and how this differs from traditional approaches to student engagement.

To illustrate these points and to highlight 'what good looks like' for university leaders responsible for the student experience, we discuss two examples of curriculum co-creation with senior executives commissioned by the NHS and the Cabinet Office. Interviews with the students participating on these programmes are used to tease out what they think of the co-creation process. Rather than presenting a sanitised version of events, we discuss the benefits but also the issues, strains and tensions co-creation places on students, staff and the institution.

To synthesise the key learning generated by these perspectives, we conclude by discussing the specific leadership challenges associated with co-creation, as well as reflecting on some of the more general lessons co-creation has for leadership development in our own sector. In this regard, many of the strategic issues tackled in the paper serve as a microcosm for the broader context of transformational change facing university leaders as they prepare for the teaching excellence framework[2], in whatever form it is implemented.

Co-creation and organisational transformation

Through the publication of the higher education green paper in November 2015[3], the government sought to initiate a debate about the nature and delivery of teaching excellence in universities. Its focus on exemplary practice for driving up teaching standards and providing a high-quality student experience adds urgency to the internal debates that habitually take place in universities across the country. Public policy initiatives such as the green paper also have to be considered within the wider rhetoric of transformational change which pervades the higher education sector. Indeed, Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi[4] characterise the pressure for change in higher education as an impending avalanche requiring urgent and drastic action. Universities operate in a world shaped by a complex cocktail of factors including the forces of globalisation, technological advance, shifting student expectations, the demands of employers, regulation and the residual impact of the financial crisis. This contemporary context requires university leaders to consider their strategic priorities, particularly the interventions that are most likely to result in progressive and significant effects.

Our ambition is that this paper will contribute to the discussion around the leadership challenges for delivering teaching excellence and shifting the culture towards one that seeks engagement, involvement and active learning with students. Co-creation is central to engagement and places students and other legitimate stakeholders at the heart of curriculum design and teaching on a sustained rather than tokenistic basis. The paper argues that such an approach would help to re-engineer the student–employer–teacher relationship and the pedagogical experiences of all three. Co-creation therefore directly addresses the green paper's call for students to be placed at the heart of the university system. More specifically, it complements the government's call to action for new approaches at both organisational and programme level around student voice, governance and pedagogical effectiveness, discussions that focus ultimately on improving the student experience in an age when they pay for and expect the best possible teaching[5].

Identifying the strategic importance of co-creation, Healey, Flint and Harrington[6] emphasise that 'engaging students and staff effectively as partners in learning and teaching is arguably one of the most important issues facing higher education in the 21st century'. This conclusion reinforces our belief that the idea of co-creation sits at a point of intersection between the need for new teaching strategies and the requirement for cultural change and transformation in the higher education sector. Returning to the importance of identifying opportunities for progressive strategic intervention, it is also an area most university leaders might reasonably tackle, given the means to do so, as it is firmly within their jurisdiction and influence.

While recognising co-creation's potential, experience also warns us of the dangers of being too prescriptive when recommending how it might be applied in different institutional settings. The discussion that follows highlights how co-creation is likely to require changes to organisational systems, culture and practice. This is why moving beyond the rhetoric of co-creation to practical implementation presents

3
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015)

4
Barber, Donnelly & Rizvi (2013)

5
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015)

6
Healey, Flint & Harrington (2014)

a challenge for higher education leaders. The primary focus for leaders engaging with this issue should be around identifying those areas of the curriculum with the potential to benefit from co-creation and then creating the right conditions for it to work. If the necessary stars are in alignment, we would argue that co-creation can then add value to both postgraduate and undergraduate curricula; whether embedded in the architecture of a complete programme as our two examples will show, or just brought to the fore for an individual module or piece of assessment. Furthermore, in terms of specific curriculum content, co-creation can be used to work from a 'blank sheet of paper' or applied to build on pre-set knowledge. The decision of whether the context is right for either wholesale or incremental innovation is, though, a matter of judgement for university leaders. With that in mind, this paper is designed to enhance leaders' understanding of the contextual antecedents of co-creation that can inform decision-making in this area, while increasing their appreciation of where and when co-creation can add the most value to the curriculum in their own organisation.

What is meant by co-creation?

Co-creation may mean different things to different people. Bovill[7] highlights how the idea of students being active partners in learning 'has gained increasing favour in higher education'. For example, research has explored issues such as students as co-producers[8], [9], [10], the role of new technology in engaging learners in knowledge creation[11], as well as the nature of staff–student partnerships[12], [13]. Underpinning these perspectives is a shared understanding that curriculum development is 'a collaborative process of learning, with the teacher and student acting as co-constructors of knowledge'[14].

This way of conceptualising the curriculum aligns with the idea of learning as an emergent, social process that requires ongoing reflection and action on the part of both academics and students. Such a collaborative orientation is important because it rejects the idea that one party is positioned 'as the producer and the other as the consumer of knowledge'; rather, co-creation can lead to a situation where both sides can learn from the other and 'transform their practices'[15]. As such, it is the antithesis of the deficit model of education 'where staff take on the role of enablers of disempowered students'[16].

Ideas into practice

Our experiences take us beyond the notion of co-creation as a singular activity carried out, for example, when a programme is created or reviewed as part of a formal and codified administrative procedure. What we call co-creation is instead embedded throughout the learning experience and might include students (and other stakeholders) working with academics to design the content of the course (or elements of it) at the outset; being consulted on marking criteria and learning outcomes; refining the programme as it progresses; generating and/or recommending teaching materials; researching and teaching elements of the course themselves; and being consulted on any future changes to the curriculum. When conceptualising this activity, we would embrace the model put forward by Healey et al[17] and shown in Figure 1. It supports our notion of co-creation by embedding student involvement in all aspects of the learning experience.

7 Bovill (2013)

8 McCulloch (2009)

9 Neary (2012)

10 Healey et al (2014)

11 McLoughlin & Lee (2008)

12 Levy, Little & Whelen (2010)

13 Higher Education Academy (2014)

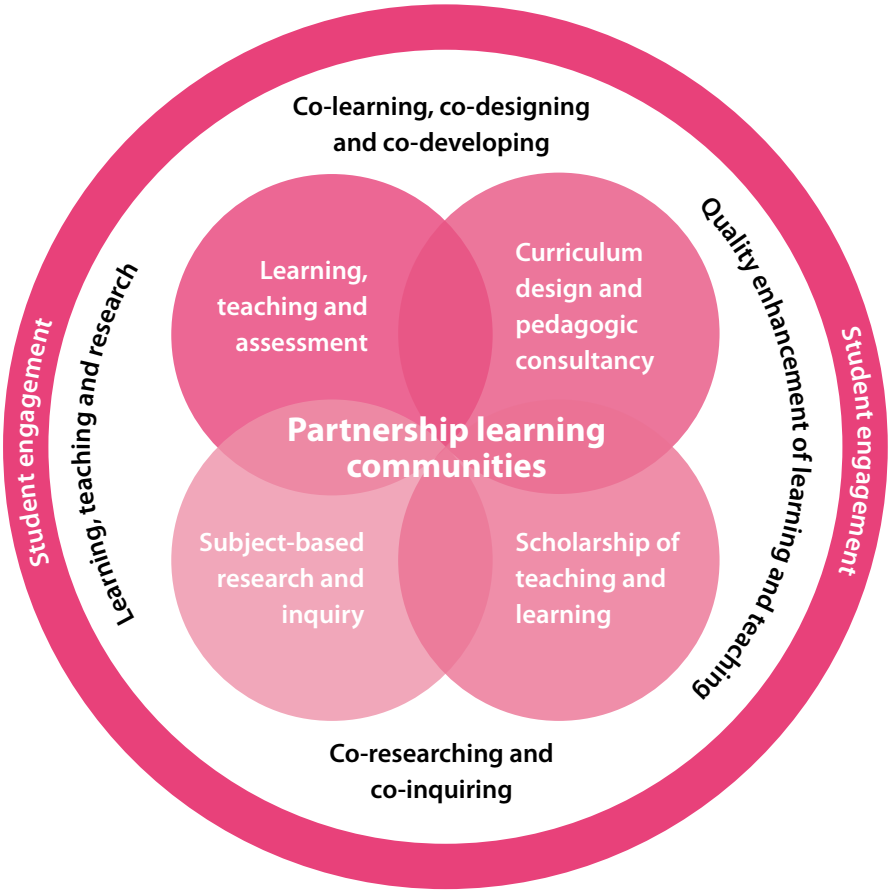
14 Fraser & Bosanquet (2006) p275

15 Antonacopoulou (2010) p22

16 Healey et al (2014) p15

17 ibid

Figure 1: A conceptual model of students as partners in learning[18]



The list of activities illustrated in Figure 1 is certainly not exhaustive, but serves to highlight that co-creation can manifest itself in a range of different ways. We would also add that the involvement of additional stakeholders such as employers, professional associations, practitioners and the media in our case, further informs and enriches the learning experience for academics, as well as students. This not only generates benefits in terms of providing additional insights on a particular programme, but can be generalised to a greater or lesser extent to characterise learning on other courses and areas of teaching provision.

A shift in mindset and new ways of working

Sustained co-creation systematically recognises and assimilates the knowledge that students bring to the classroom and that other stakeholders can also contribute. It acknowledges and, most importantly, promotes the productive role this can play in developing curriculum design, content, learning and assessment methods. It can also stimulate students to do research into the subject of learning. These attributes support the view that co-creation expands the pool of knowledge held traditionally by universities and teachers, transforming the learning experience into something that adds value for students, as they are active participants, and for staff and the higher education institution as a whole.

18
Ibid p.25

19
NUS (2012)

20
Hess & Ostrom (2011)

21
ibid p5

22
Bollier (2011) p34

Such outcomes are impossible to replicate through more traditional models of education that set knowledge boundaries and regard teachers as the holders and beneficent dispensers of knowledge. Co-creation can be framed as a strategic mindset, as well as a way of working, which has the potential to alter radically the way that higher education institutions see their purpose and then organise to achieve it[19]. At programme level it also helps academics align their practice as educators with the principles they teach. For example, it reinforces the view that learning is a continuing and creative process. The collaboration, innovation and participation embedded in curriculum co-creation help to provide the multiple perspectives that academics in lecture theatres and seminar rooms across higher education tell their students to seek out and embrace.

Co-creation therefore generates different approaches and ways of understanding, as well as iterative cycles of reflection and action that involve students and academics in an ongoing process of collective sense-making and knowledge creation. Thus, content (and form) are constantly relevant and stimulating for students.

Knowledge as a commons

To help leaders articulate the benefits of co-creation, it is instructive to think of subject knowledge as an emerging and perpetually refreshed commons that is owned jointly by all of the parties involved. This idea aligns with an emerging area of scholarship current in economics, which argues that knowledge is best viewed as a resource that is created and shared by a group[20]. It is a perspective that frames knowledge as being held in common ownership and as a community asset that is inclusive rather than exclusive.

Conceptualising knowledge in this way is different in one important aspect from commons that comprise natural resources such as water, fisheries and forests. These are subtractive resource commons in which one person's use reduces the benefits available to another. However, in a knowledge context, the more people who share the resource 'the greater the common good'[21]. A knowledge commons can therefore be regarded as additive; if there is an increase in the number of people who join the community, the opportunity for them to add to the commons by contributing their own knowledge also increases. Indeed, it is the interactions between those in the commons that lead to new knowledge creation opportunities. The more people who participate, the greater the value for everyone because they all draw down benefits without depleting the resource. Bollier[22] refers to this as 'the cornucopia of the commons'.

In this paper we suggest that combining insights from others and pooling knowledge is the most effective way to arrive at a deeper understanding of the sort of complex social phenomenon that are studied in higher education, most especially in the applied and vocationally oriented curriculum. Such an approach requires collaboration, the cross-fertilisation of ideas and high levels of engagement between academics and a range of different stakeholders. In the context of a co-created curriculum, this leads to better learning outcomes through peer production and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. The ongoing process of dialogue embedded in this approach also helps to generate social capital and

facilitates learning, and are also ends in themselves for universities seeking to create lasting relationships with their students.

Guarding against separation and enclosure

In addition to suggesting progressive ways forward, thinking of knowledge as a commons also serves as an antidote to a regressive tendency that can blight higher education; that is, the potential for academic fields to evolve into a form of anti-commons. First applied by Heller[23] in relation to the knowledge sphere, the concept of the anti-commons in this context refers to the potential underuse of knowledge through practices such as intellectual property rights and patenting. We suggest that the potential for academic fields to become a form of anti-commons is driven not by excessive regulation, but by a lack of participation in, and engagement with, research and learning by other stakeholders such as students, not through their own choice, but because they are discouraged to do so by academics.

Egan[24] highlights how the notions of use and engagement are crucial to the commons concept. Drawing on another of the distinct intellectual traditions underpinning the commons movement, universities therefore need to guard against creating a form of virtual enclosure[25]; that is, scholarly communities characterised by separation rather than shared spaces, open science and collective knowledge. In his historical overview of the movement, Wall[26] concludes that such enclosure represents the true tragedy of the commons.

23
Heller (1998)

24
Egan (2014)

25
Willis (2015)

26
Wall (2014)

27
Havergal (2015)

28
Bovill (2013)

29
Healey et al (2014)

30
Havergal (2015)

31
Willis & McKie (2011)

32
Bovill & Bulley (2011)

Rhetoric versus reality

While co-creation is spoken about as a pedagogical strategy, there is scant evidence of its practice in higher education institutions[27]. Discussion around curriculum co-creation has been more prevalent in the schools-based literature[28]. These debates are usually framed around ideas associated with critical pedagogy and giving students a voice, the provenance of which can be traced back to the turn of the 20th century and Dewey's advocacy for democratic classrooms. The lack of engagement with co-creation in universities contrasts not only with this pedagogical discourse in the schools sector, but also with the rhetoric of change that surrounds universities, particularly the discussions linked to the importance of innovation in higher education delivery.

There are, however, an increasing number of examples where partnering with students in learning is taking place, as illustrated by Healey et al[29]. Interestingly, it is apparent that the majority of these examples of innovative provision are in the new university sector where teaching forms a greater part of staff activity, or where there are notable champions who have roles with influence. The contemporary conclusion reached by Havergal[30] is that co-creation is not ubiquitous and is resisted by some institutions.

At a time when universities should be demonstrating creativity and leadership in developing new pedagogical approaches, an outdated, largely conduit model still underpins much academic practice and thinking[31]. Despite promoting themselves as change experts, universities are still governed by antiquated institutional structures, processes and methods that are driven by regulation, inspection and inertia. This context can stifle innovation and creativity, as well as being at odds with the rhetoric universities use in the market.

The result is that institutions perpetuate 'approved' teaching programmes that promote a curriculum frozen in time and space until the next scheduled course review. Many of these programmes incorporate the very latest academic research, but it is knowledge that is 'owned' and 'transmitted' by course deliverers rather than surfaced through the act of collaboration or student participation. There is little credence given to the notion that students, particularly but not exclusively mature ones, can offer their own value too if they were only given the opportunity to contribute it.

Questions for leaders

To provide some nuance to the discussion, it is important to recognise that some subjects are more amenable than others to the co-creation of content[32]. This is because some curricula are more prescribed, particularly where professional bodies are involved, or where the knowledge is more aligned to the natural sciences.

The key issue for leaders is to recognise which curriculum areas are more suited to this approach, although we argue that delivery is always open to negotiation. Indeed, given the demands from students and employers for universities to be more responsive to their quickly changing needs and their desire to be more

involved in the design of courses, we would suggest the question leaders should begin with is 'why not co-creation?' rather than 'why?'.

In view of the caveats above, this next set of questions will not apply to all programmes, but are worth leaders reflecting on to help inform their own assessment of their institution's existing capacity for co-creation:

- What are the perceptions of your students: how do they feel involved in the design and delivery of the curriculum?
- Are your programmes situationally sensitive and self-adjusting: does the content respond to emerging student and contextual needs?
- What specific examples do you have in your university of curriculum co-creation being sustained throughout an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, continuing professional development or executive education programme? Why do these programmes exist: tutor vanity? student wishes? mutual gain? employer expectations?
- Do these cases reflect how you generally do things, or are they isolated pockets of practice?
- Do your approval and monitoring systems and processes support or hinder such initiatives?
- Is your pedagogical culture predisposed towards self-organisation: what latitude do individual tutors have to work with students on refining the curriculum?
- Can programmes be different for each cohort depending on the results of the co-creation process engaged with for each?
- Are your programmes governed by rigorous learning outcomes rather than driven by content?

The importance of dialogue, relationships and facilitation

These questions serve as a useful reality check when trying to strip away the rhetoric of co-creation from the potential constraints of the context. Such a focus on the student experience in curriculum design is important at a time when the latest academic knowledge can be downloaded for free from prestigious institutions across the globe. Lawrence Summers, President Emeritus of Harvard University, tells of how he met a 12-year-old girl from Pakistan who had been teaching herself university-level physics using online course materials from Stanford. He then goes on to note that the introductory biology course from MIT is about to be made available for free around the world. Thus, the question has to be asked, if the best conduit-based teaching is now offered online, what can students gain from attending particular universities?

In answer to this question, Barber at al[33] conclude that much of the value that universities add in the future will not be linked to course content as this becomes more ubiquitous and the province of the world's elite institutions. Rather, 'it will be a matter of what a university and its faculty build around the content'; in short, 'the quality of the teaching' and 'the nature of the facilitated dialogue between students'[34].

33
Barber at al (2013)

34
ibid p51

The next section of this paper charts our own experiences of curriculum co-creation through a structured programme of facilitated stakeholder engagement that we designed and developed for two separate programmes, one of which is complete and allows opportunities for a full circle of reflection (the NHS) and one that is ongoing (the Cabinet Office). Our aim here is to provide insights that can be used to assist leadership decision-making. The difference between these cases and those currently described in the literature is that they are at postgraduate level and concern executive education. They are premium products in commercial and academic terms.

The cases we present allow us to discuss a wide range of issues. These include the circumstances that led us to take the initial plunge into co-creation. This background is important as it highlights how the needs of students (as well as employers in this case) can lead inexorably to co-creation, regardless of whether individuals or organisations are ready for it or not. Other areas covered include our particular method of delivery for co-creation, which we set out in detail as part of the first case; the specific implications the approach generates for staff and students; as well as a range of additional issues higher education leaders need to consider.

Programme 1: NHS

Since its inception, more than 60 years ago, the NHS has become the world's largest publicly funded health system and, with 1.6 million staff, one of the five largest employers in the world[35]. The continuing evolution of the NHS has created significant change for those working in and with it and this first case was prompted by the world class commissioning[36] and next stage review[37] initiatives. An aspiration was set that communication professionals in the system should strive to be 'world class' too.

In response to this demand, the question was asked by the NHS' national director of communication 'What Does Good Look Like?' in NHS communication. The NHS commissioned the authors to undertake the research for 'What Good Looks Like' in NHS communications with the subsequent report providing the underpinning for the Department of Health policy document 'The Communicating Organisation'[38]. Concurrent with this came a request for us to devise a development programme for senior communicators which would equip them to undertake a more strategic role. This prompted discussions between the director of NHS communication and the 10 directors of communication in strategic health authorities, as well as the authors, one of whom had already completed significant research for the NHS on practitioner competencies[39].

Establishing the programme's parameters

A series of short courses was proposed initially but it quickly became apparent that this needed to be a substantive programme that went beyond the requirements of skills development. A broader, executive education programme would be necessary to satisfy the demands placed on these senior managers. Discussions also revealed a number of imperatives that needed to characterise the provision.

One was the flexibility to accommodate any new and emerging priorities in communication generated by a complex health system in a continuous state of change. Another was that the people who would be involved in the programme should act as catalysts in the system, mentoring others as they learned themselves. A third was that because of their seniority and intimacy with the working context, they would need to work collaboratively in order to share their own experiences, develop new and possibly joint ways of working and benefit from the network that they would establish during the course of the programme. In the process of doing this, they were in a position to create new knowledge for the system which could then be integrated as best practice.

35
NHS (2016)

36
Department of Health (2009a)

37
Department of Health (2009b)

38
Department of Health (2009c)

39
Gregory (2008; 2009)

40
Public Relations Society of America (2006)

Co-creating an executive masters programme

We decided, together with the responsible senior director (supported by her peer directors), that this was a programme that needed to be co-created each time it was run and with a built-in flexibility to incorporate new content driven by the contextual demands of each cohort. It was also agreed that this process would require input from:

- the prospective students themselves on how they saw their own role developing, given the new requirements demanded of them and consequently their own development needs
- the Department of Health, via the director of communication for the NHS, about the system requirements
- chief executives of NHS organisations on their understanding of what the communication contribution could and should be, the gaps in capability that they saw in their organisations, and their aspirations for their communication function and senior personnel.

Having obtained this multi-dimensional perspective from different levels in the NHS, the authors then integrated and synthesised this data to develop a tailor-made programme at graduate level, which also took into account their own experience in developing and examining Masters work, of the professional literature on graduate programmes (for example, Public Relations Society of America[40]), and UK graduate and subject benchmarking requirements.

A proposal for a co-created executive Masters programme was put to and accepted by the NHS. At this stage the overall structure of the programme was agreed. There were to be three stages lasting 18 months in total, which would be reviewed after the programme was run for the first time. The structure satisfied client, academic and regulatory requirements, so this became the format of the subsequent programme.

Stage 1 covered what was identified and negotiated as required core knowledge, skills and behaviours by the students, their employers and the tutors. This element of the programme was taught in short blocks.

Stage 2 consisted of a series of master classes dealing with contemporary issues facing senior communicators. The topics would be negotiated during the course.

Stage 3 was a work-based project, individually negotiated by students with the course tutors and directly relevant to their role and/or organisation. This could be, for example, a piece of research, a project, a service development or a cross-departmental initiative, but had to incorporate the requisite level of postgraduate rigour, as well as having practical relevance.

More detail on these stages is given in the next section.

A framework for co-creation

The co-created content was determined using five basic strategic planning questions that focused on the participating executives (the students) and their sponsoring organisations each time the programme was run:

1. **Where are you now?** This involved two pieces of research. First, a participating student survey covered issues such as organisational and communication strategy; communicative capability and capacity; organisational attitudes towards communication; and the key communication challenges facing the student and their team. The second piece of research, independently commissioned, explored the value placed on communication by the sponsoring chief executive officers (CEOs). A semi-structured interview was conducted with each CEO to gain a rounded perspective of current and future perceptions and expectations of their senior communication professional.

2. **Where do you need to be?** This involved the teaching team facilitating a workshop that sought to identify and then organise the cohort's key communication issues and challenges into themes. This allowed both tutors and students to explore a range of critical factors that were also informed by the communication survey and CEO interviews. The aim of the workshop was to define content and help catalyse collective ownership for the programme. It culminated in the students agreeing a development vision that then became the programme's strategic terms of reference from which the teaching team produced an initial programme which, after adjustment, became the programme.

3. **How do you get there?** This involved delivering the teaching programme so as to encourage discussion and collaboration amongst the students. Delivery methods included interactive and action-learning-based sessions, mini-lectures, master classes, tutor-facilitated discussions, long and short in-class exercises, and mini-projects (both group and individual). The style of teaching was dialogue and conversation-based, with students being encouraged to use their own organisations as examples and case studies for discussion in tutorials and workshops. Further teaching support was provided by external practitioners and academic experts.

   Assessment methods included reflective learning journals, presentations, long and short assignments, work-based learning projects, and assessed tasks. In addition, a session was allocated in each teaching block for participants to share how they had applied their learning since the previous one.

   At the end of stage 1, the taught phase, a one-day 'coming up for air' session was held, providing students with another opportunity to explicitly shape the content of the programme as it was being developed. Students were reminded of the requirements of their CEOs and provided with an update on the NHS system requirements. The resulting gap analysis highlighted key areas for further exploration. These were voted on by the students and

the six top-ranked issues were identified as subjects of master classes. The students then chose one of these topics as being particularly challenging and relevant to them.

An additional 'surprise' for the students was that they were unaware during the process of negotiating the content that they would then have to develop and deliver the master classes themselves. This was important since the tutors wanted them to choose topics that were relevant and challenging.

The students then became responsible for the delivery of a day-long master class, with supporting handbook, which constituted stage 2 of the programme. The criteria for delivery were that the content needed to meet postgraduate standards of scholarship, to be contextualised for their own organisation and to be relevant to their peers.

Students were given support from topic experts from outside the teaching team and usually outside the university. Pedagogical advice was provided by the tutors.

4. **Are you getting there?** A coaching ethos characterised the programme, which helped the students review the progress of their journey. Regular periods of reflection provided opportunities for students to discuss issues and share solutions. Tutors also prepared new material during the course of programme delivery to address emerging needs. In parallel, students were encouraged to participate in an active support network that was facilitated by the tutors.

   For the tutors, regular student feedback after each element of the course enabled continual fine-tuning in response to emerging needs. The increasing maturity of the students themselves as reflective practitioners and learners made this task progressively more difficult, but it helped the programme address deeper and more challenging questions and to respond to changes in the health environment.

5. **How did you do?** This question helped focus on the summative evaluation of the programme at two additional levels. First, it enabled students to provide feedback on the overall success of the development programme at an individual level. This also helped to determine the future development needs of the students, as well as the people they managed. In addition, feedback from CEOs was sought to gauge their views on whether the programme had benefited the individual student and the organisation. This proved very positive, with CEOs reporting a marked difference in the capability and confidence of students, many of whom were promoted or went on to other roles that used their newly acquired expertise more comprehensively. The results of both the formative and summative evaluation informed the design and content of subsequent programmes.

Programme 2: Cabinet Office

This second case describes another co-created postgraduate programme that was instigated in 2014 for the UK Government Communication Service (GCS) which is based in the Cabinet Office. There are over 3,000 permanent civil servants based across Whitehall and in arm's-length bodies (such as the Environment Agency) charged with communicating government policy, providing information about government activities and programmes to the public, and enabling the operation of the public service.

When the coalition government was formed in 2010, the GCS was reorganised and its budget cut significantly. A new executive director was appointed in December 2012 and he has continued the reform of the service, putting in place a number of initiatives, including a major capability improvement programme covering all levels of the service.

One of these strands is the senior talent programme, known colloquially as Inspire. Inspire comprises a number of elements, including work placements, extended and tailored in-company training events, self-presentation training and stretch projects that cut across government work, as well as coaching and mentoring support. The co-created Masters also forms part of this programme and the authors were asked to design and deliver this. Its structure follows loosely the NHS programme described above, with the outline structure and stages agreed at the beginning of the programme with input from students, the Cabinet Office, directors of communication from the large government departments, and independent experts in the field of communication. Stage 1 comprises the three taught elements which are co-created with greater input from the employer in this instance, but with feedback from students taken into account. Stage 2 comprises master classes, but these are half the weight of the NHS equivalent. To complete stage 2, students undertake a project that is jointly negotiated with tutors and the Cabinet Office and is of use to the service as a whole. They are allocated supervisors for the project and can choose to work in learning sets or individually. Stage 3 comprises a work-based project similar to that in the NHS programme.

As indicated, the co-creation takes place directly with the employer rather than the students. However, student input is regarded as vital and after each taught module, feedback is taken via questionnaire and by conversations that both the Cabinet Office and tutors have with them. Reflective learning journals completed after each of the taught blocks reveal key learnings and issues remaining to be addressed. Following conversations with Cabinet Office staff and consideration of the student perspective, successive taught modules are originated within the overall agreed framework. The master classes are again directly negotiated with students.

41
Bovill (2013) p8

What do the students and employers think of co-creation?

In the autumn of 2013 one of the authors (PW) conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with former students from the co-created Masters NHS executive programme. An additional interview was also conducted with a consultant (Co), who was commissioned by the NHS to project manage the Masters programme's first cohort. He was involved in the development of the first Masters programme, working closely with the university's team, as well as the students, and was also the person who interviewed relevant CEOs as part of the first tranche of co-creation activity. The other author (AG) has conducted semi-structured interviews with five students on the Cabinet Office course, two Whitehall directors of communication and four senior members of the GCS management team who sponsored the second Masters programme.

A compelling approach

The co-creation model is perceived by the students to be an innovative and welcome pedagogical approach. As one said, 'it is a unique course, there is nothing out there like it', and another commented that 'it didn't feel like the usual chalk and talk'. Nonetheless, Co still spoke of 'a leap of faith' when the programme was commissioned by the NHS. This was partly offset by the perceived experience and credibility of the teaching team which meant 'we were happy to go with it … and this also generated the momentum to make it happen'. Another factor in the NHS' decision-making was the perception that co-creation is especially important in a vocational context, given that business disciplines, such as strategic communication, are an 'ever-moving subject'.
Students on the Cabinet Office course mirrored this, with one interviewee saying, 'we knew it was designed with our particular needs in mind', and another saying 'you listened and responded and that is unusual on any course'.

Engaging education

The interviews highlighted that co-creation has the power to enhance student and employer engagement. Students spoke about how they 'had ownership of the sessions' and were therefore more inclined to listen and participate from the outset. Co-creation generated 'buy-in' amongst the students and employers. However, it is also important for teaching teams to recognise that some students and employers at the beginning of the programme might be sceptical about the claims made regarding their capacity to shape the course content. This highlights the importance of the teaching team identifying quick wins that demonstrate at the outset how feedback can manifest itself into tangible course content. It is important for students to feel 'from day one' that the programme 'wasn't set in stone'. This is what Bovill[41] refers to as 'a liminal or breakthrough moment' in the student–tutor relationship.

A strong cohort identity

The students and employers spoke of how the co-creation process created an abiding sense of community within the group which stretched above and beyond

other education programmes they had experienced. Several of those interviewed spoke of the 'strong bonds' that developed between members of the group and how this fostered a culture of collaboration amongst them. For the NHS, this manifested itself during and after the programme as these relationships led to the creation of joint project teams that continued to operate outside the programme. For example, the cohort put in place procedures for joint commissioning of communication services such as research and evaluation and made a bid as a group to undertake national work for the NHS. The same was true of the Cabinet Office groups, whose participants said, for example, that one of the most valuable consequences of the course was 'a strong network … I know I always have someone to call'.

The generation of a strong cohort identity is also important for the institution. Students spend a great deal of time reflecting, working and negotiating together (and with tutors) on course content and ways of working. The cohort becomes increasingly cohesive and self-supportive and, to an extent, self-managing. This strong cohort identity was anticipated to an extent, but its depth and value-added dimensions were not fully expected. The bond between students and tutors also provided great personal job satisfaction for the academics involved and added to their enjoyment of their subject as they too were challenged and re-energised by the insights students bring. More instrumentally, these relationships create a solid foundation for future alumni activities and development.

Building trust

Students remarked on how the trust built up within the cohort during co-creation allowed them to talk about their own experiences of practice in an open manner. As one student put it, 'we could cut out the spin … and get down to the nitty gritty'. Another spoke of meeting fellow students as 'like a family get-together' and remarked on the level of honesty and depth of sharing that took place. This environment allowed the students to explore together the territory between academic theory and desanitised accounts of practice. The outcome was a willingness to share and learn from their experiences whether good, bad or indifferent.

A (welcome) power imbalance

Although co-creation promotes a partnership between the tutor and student, a power imbalance and role identity are accepted and welcomed; that is, our students were comfortable with the idea that tutors were ultimately in control of the process and that they were not required to work from a 'blank piece of paper'. There is an ambiguity at the heart of the co-creation process regarding the relationship between the student and the tutor. Students are keen to have an input in shaping the content, but at the same time want a degree of direction from the tutor. It was recognised by the students interviewed that the teaching team 'knew where the group needed to develop' and 'brought a broader perspective' to bear on the learning. This balance was not always achieved, however. In places, the teaching team was criticised for not providing enough guidance, particularly in the master classes where the students were responsible for delivering a day of teaching on a selected project. The need for a clearer framework for the students to work within during this part of the programme was highlighted.

The relationship with employers is different. Here the relationship is more obviously peer-to-peer working. The higher education institution may have academic expertise, but employers are also clients, particularly if they are paying for their staff to attend. The focus here is to balance what employers deem necessary for their organisation and the need to maintain academic independence and integrity.

Contextually intelligent content

The key benefit of co-creation acknowledged by all of the students and employers we interviewed was its ability to generate tailored content that was contextualised to their own situation. As one student put it: 'we could tie the content back into the day job', and it 'felt apparent you tried to appreciate our roles and environment … a lot of thought and effort went into tailoring to our needs'. Another of the students added, 'it didn't feel like you knew all of the answers, rather you knew the questions and we were able to solve those big wicked problems together'.

This led to the creation of a learning experience that was theoretically sound but also practical and ready to be applied in the workplace. The teaching team worked hard to ensure the course content was always up to date and engaging for students. Most importantly, employers were able to provide context and information on contemporary challenges and students were able to bring their current issues, concerns and potential opportunities into the programme and have them thoroughly explored as long as they had relevance for the whole class. Where they had not, tutors had to make a judgement call on how much personal advice they could offer. Every student interviewed spoke of how they continue to use the models, materials and strategies they studied as part of the Masters programme. Several highlighted how they still refer to their course notes which are kept close to hand in the office: 'I can give no higher accolade [to the programme content] than [that] it is being used now'.

Where should leaders begin with co-creation?

Having set out the process of co-creation and the key benefits from a student and employer perspective, it is now necessary to draw out the most important issues and risks associated with its practice. In our experience these are not 'managerial concerns' but are leadership challenges, given that they relate to the fundamental purpose of what universities should offer in their provision and the strategies needed to achieve this. Co-creation is not about making small changes, or tinkering around the edges; rather, as Gärdebo & Wiggberg[42] note, 'if there is to be a single important structural change during the coming decades, it is the changing role of students who are given more room in defining and contributing to higher education'.

The first substantive issue curriculum co-creation raises for higher education leaders is the speed and extent to which it should become embedded in the working culture of universities. We suggest the magnitude of the change and the challenges of the process require champions across the institution. To achieve a network of advocates and encourage a community of practice, a phased approach is recommended as a viable way forward in two respects.

First, the *totality* of the co-created curriculum can be grown incrementally with one or a few modules being co-created first and as confidence and expertise grows, full courses, programmes, departments and the institution moving towards co-creation as a norm. Alternatively, as the examples in this paper show, a course-by-course approach is possible. The point here is that once staff, students and other stakeholders see and derive the benefits, it is difficult, but not impossible, for co-creation and more traditional forms of teaching and learning to co-exist on the same programme.

Second, the *degree* of co-creation can also be incremental. Healey et al[43] show Bovill and Bulley's[44] adaptation of Arnstein's[45] ladder of participation to demonstrate this point (Figure 2):

42
Gärdebo & Wiggberg (2012) p9

43
Healey et al (2014) p49

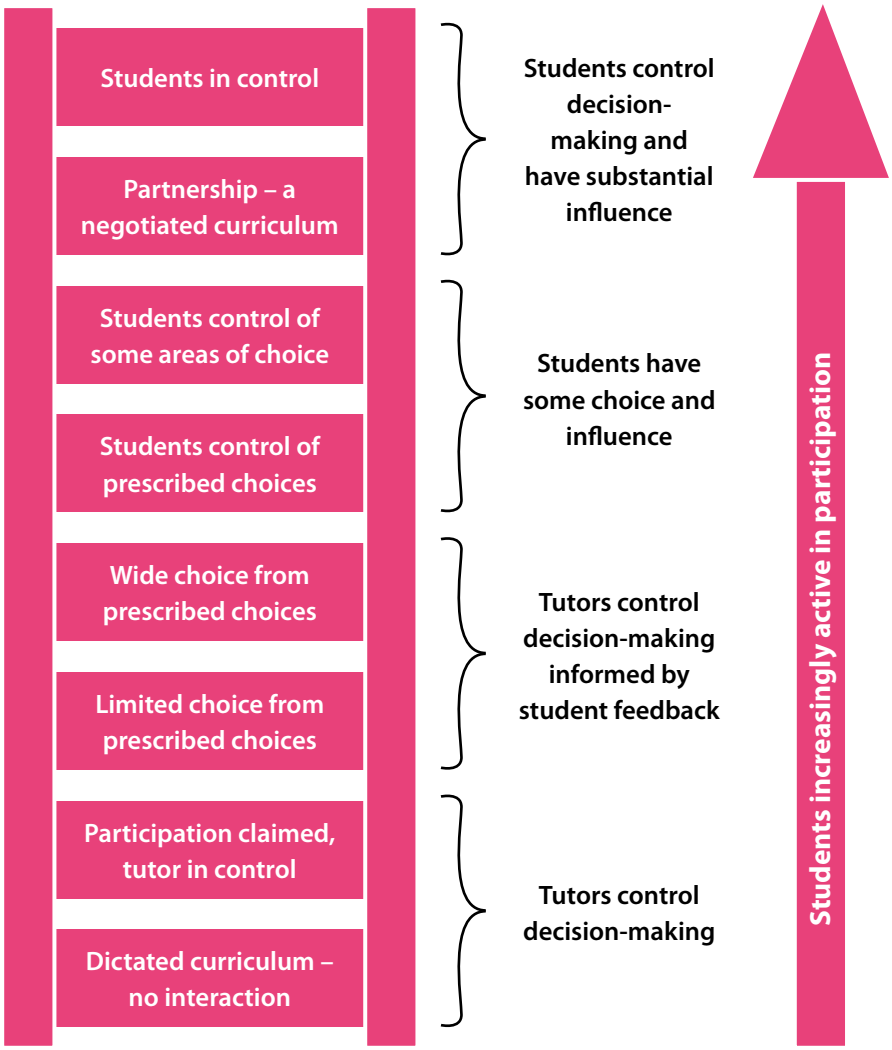
44
Bovill & Bulley (2011)

45
Arnstein (1969)

46
Bovill & Bulley (2011); adapted from Arnstein (1969)

47
Havergal (2015)

Figure 2. Ladder of student participation in curriculum design[46]



A phased implementation strategy allows the organisation to learn about co-creation through pilot studies and small-scale experimentation. This approach recognises that it takes time for institutional processes, staff, students and other stakeholders to adapt to this way of working. It is further suggested that this phased strategy can be enhanced if leaders encourage pockets of co-creation in different faculties and subject areas with the aim of generating institutional learning in a range of disciplinary contexts. Furthermore, such activity can be pump-primed by some form of innovation fund.

Improvising from the experience of others

To inform the implementation process, there is a small but growing number of examples of student partnering in curriculum development and delivery as Havergal[47] reports. Although those documented are at undergraduate level, the cases given in this paper illustrate that co-creation is also possible for postgraduate executive education where both students and employers are involved. In this context, we have successfully applied our co-creation model to six postgraduate

cohorts. While five comprised experienced managers, one was made up of young professionals who were fresh from university and starting their in-house communication careers as graduate trainees.

While Bovill[48] notes there is 'no one way to approach co-creating curricula', our experience shows how elements of the model we have developed can be applied to different postgraduate cohorts and, we would suggest, to the undergraduate examples provided in the extant literature. Indeed, the five planning questions outlined as part of the NHS case have the potential to be used as a framework in a range of educational contexts to shape a strategic conversation with students and others involved in the process of co-creation. These questions can be used as an initial guide from which staff can develop their own approaches and improvisations.

Tackling process

Quality control is another important issue that leaders need to consider in the context of co-creation. The processes that are linked to course approval and the institutional regulatory environment are necessarily rigorous. Approving a course or programme portfolio that can only provide indicative content is unusual. Furthermore, it is the experience of the authors that a chasm exists between institutional rhetoric and the reality experienced when academics seek approval for courses that are underpinned predominately by learning outcomes and provide minimal detail on course content.

Course outcomes are seen to be key drivers of quality assurance and it is right that university leaders receive significant assurance that learning outcomes are at the right level, are in accordance with national and university benchmarks and can be properly assessed. However, institutions appear to struggle with learning outcomes that are generically framed and where content is minimal, thereby providing the freedom to design/redesign content and assessments at each iteration. Such an approach usually encounters significant challenge, especially from middle managers who have quality responsibilities in their role. In our experience, senior management is generally more enthusiastic and understanding of such initiatives, although the inherent tension between co-creation policy and co-creation pedagogy remains; that is, policy lays out the shape and direction of teaching and learning in advance, while the essence of pedagogy in a co-creation context is about welcoming the novel and embracing what is impossible to know in advance[49].

These observations highlight a cultural and operational clash, which generates important implications for university leaders. On the one hand, there is a requirement to provide programmes that can be developed quickly and have in-built flexibility. This capability is in line with market demands which require universities to be responsive to the needs of students and employers. On the other hand, there is a legitimate internal agenda that is concerned with internal processes and monitoring for regulatory purposes. The leadership and governance challenge is how to speed up and de-bureaucratise processes while keeping the rigour. There is also a need for staff development for those involved in quality processes who seek reassurance in fixed content. A key question for leaders is whether their programme development is genuinely shaped by purpose or driven

48
Bovill (2013) p10

49
Healey et al (2014)

by process. Even limited experimentation has risk attached to it, which reinforces why university leaders need to create an organisational environment where co-creation is accommodated in university processes, actively encouraged and facilitated by staff with the necessary skills and managerial support.

The importance of wide stakeholder engagement

A genuine commitment to – and understanding of – the processes associated with co-creation must also extend to the university's key delivery partners. Leaders need to ensure that programme managers secure early buy-in from others in the value chain so as to mitigate any external problems associated with governance. This observation relates to our reflections on the potential concerns and risks attached to the appointment of an external examiner who understood that comparisons between cohorts needed to be made purely on the achievement of learning outcomes, rather than on content. Likewise, some professional bodies are keen to assure themselves of the content of programmes and the authors are cognisant that prescribed knowledge is essential in some professional settings.

Creating an environment in which curriculum co-creation is not only understood but prized is also crucial. This requires a commitment to employee communication and engagement on the part of university leaders. It should be recognised that some colleagues will regard co-creation as 'pandering' to students and a route liable to 'dumbing down'. Our experience was the exact reverse. Executive-level students (and undergraduates) are especially keen to be stretched, to learn new things, while also taking responsibility for their own learning. Indeed, they need specific assurance that the course will add value. To reassure more sceptical colleagues, the requirement for rigour in framing the learning outcomes has to be apparent. Involvement in moderating the resultant work and being taken through the process and results via staff development sessions are also essential. With these challenges in mind, we took every opportunity to promote our approach and work in staff meetings, research events and in internal publications. Crucial to this process of engagement was the explicit endorsement and support of the leaders in our own institution through one-to-one meetings, presentations and written communication.

Developmental support

It is apparent that co-creation programmes cannot be taught or managed by inexperienced tutors. Individuals who are sure of their 'craft' as a teacher, as well as confident in handling empowered students, employers and other stakeholders, have to be involved. They also need to be open to the development of new skills and practices. In this kind of programme, the tutor assumes the role of coach and mentor more fully than is often the case in traditional higher education provision.

Helping tutors to reconfigure their teaching practice in this context requires an investment in their development by the institution. However, in addition to supporting co-creation, another impact of this investment is a set of engaged teaching staff who are spurred on in their research ambitions as they seek to know

more about their subject and 'push the boundaries' in order to meet the demands of their students. For those staff more focused on teaching, co-creation can be a spur to develop their scholarly and research capability, as well as wider teaching expertise (see Figure 1 above).

Following a skills assessment, a potential investment may also need to be made in wider managerial, as opposed to core academic knowledge and skills. For example, setting the parameters for negotiated content in co-creation sessions requires skilful facilitation by experienced tutors who are able to set the ground rules carefully. While the topics for learning are open for negotiation, the programmes cannot be regarded as an extended training course. In our co-created programmes, students and employers argued for skills development to take priority. As a result, both of these stakeholders needed to be advised that they were shaping a Masters course in which national subject benchmarks needed to be met that required 'masterly' engagement with academic theory. Similar challenges also emerged around the need to build postgraduate attributes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, team working, leadership and research capability into both the course content and assessments. Managing expectations and maintaining positive relationships in this context can be challenging and require appropriate developmental support for staff who lack experience in these areas.

A duty of care

The previous points about the need for staff development support are strongly associated with issues linked to the potential vulnerability of teaching staff and the duty of care leaders have to an organisation's employees. As those who teach executive Masters programmes know, working with senior professionals is challenging. To produce something that is co-created and co-produced with such students is doubly so. Indeed, due to their seniority and contextual knowledge, students are often more informed than academics and this has to be accepted by tutors not as a threat, but as an opportunity for the whole group to learn from each other. This kind of disparity of experience will also occur in undergraduate learning as students will bring personal experience of diversity, ethnicity, new technology, popular culture, etc. The traditional teacher–student power relationship is therefore altered, although it should be recognised that maintaining ultimate control over assessment still preserves this to a large extent even if an element of negotiated assessment and peer marking is introduced.

University leaders should further recognise that there are inherent dangers in the partnerships forged between students and tutors by co-creation. The potential for confusion over roles and tasks can pose a threat to the professional identity of academics. Here issues of power, recognition, responsibility and accountability come into play[50]. It is important, therefore, that 'lines' are clearly drawn to ensure that both parties are secure and protected both personally and academically. Having a course leader who does not take a major teaching role in the co-created programme but instead seeks to provide a detached and objective oversight of the programme can help this process.

50
Healey et al (2014)

51
ibid

52
Boshyk, Barker & Dilworth (2010)

Thinking through these issues suggests that traditional course structures need to change if the challenges inherent in co-creation are to be addressed on a fair and sustainable basis. When considering the implications of student partnerships for universities, Healey et al[51] argue for the introduction of a new role in universities, which they refer to as an academic developer, an internal expert who works with both staff and students to bring about curriculum change. In a co-creation context, this advisory role could help tutors and students navigate a range of challenging pedagogical issues.

Time pressures

Perhaps the greatest employee vulnerability associated with co-creation is the way in which such programmes require tutors to generate content in response to the reflective periods that pepper the programme. In practice, this often means that material is prepared at short notice (in our case overnight during residential programmes), or that impromptu mini-tutorials were undertaken immediately in class. This kind of environment is very demanding on tutors and it is not one that all staff can handle. In this case, team-teaching proved very helpful with tutors 'double-heading' the sessions. This meant, to borrow Revan's phrase from action learning, the authors worked together in the spirit of partners in adversity[52]. The opportunity to collaborate, share ideas, contribute different perspectives and split the work was invaluable and helped us to manage the inevitable pressures generated by this learning environment. It also enhanced the teaching with students observing that there may be two different perspectives on theoretical approaches and to resolving problems: this reflected their 'messy' world.

From the foregoing it can also be seen that these kinds of programmes take up more time than traditional ones, not only in preparation, but in client liaison, as well as discussions with students about content and support. While a consultancy model of charging fees can cover the cost of this time, traditional timetabling and work-profiling models do not always fully account for the additional time taken. This situation requires specific interventions by leaders to ensure that systems accommodate such innovative delivery. As indicated earlier, there are also deep issues around self-identity, power and institutionalised processes, as well as time and working practices to address, all of which may need to be underpinned by contractual discussions with employees.

Pricing

For higher education institutions, a clearly communicated market offer based on the idea of co-creation can provide an attractive proposition to employers and students who wish to benefit from education that is individually tailored, relevant, responsive and rigorous. Programmes of this nature can have a high perceived value amongst students and other stakeholders, while also presenting an opportunity for universities to establish a point of difference with other institutions.

This context can provide an opportunity to charge higher fees. For our original Masters programme we successfully made the case that the co-creation process required the university's fee to be recalculated for each cohort on the basis of a daily consultancy or cohort fee, rather than a fixed price per student. While not

applicable for all programmes, this funding model has particular potential for in-company executive education where the time taken in scoping and co-creating the programme may not be clear at the outset. The pricing of such programmes also needs to take into account the extra relationship-management support provided by other university staff. In time this support might become the norm for the institution and embedded in its funding model, but during the pilot and experimentation phase, consideration needs to be given to how this activity will be funded.

53
Rittel & Webber (1973)

54
Camillus (2008) p100

55
ibid p100

56
Hall (2013)

57
Camillus (2008) p102

58
ibid p102

Co-creation as a wicked problem

The leadership issues that have just been discussed highlight that creating an organisational environment and culture in which curriculum co-creation can flourish is a complex challenge for universities. At the heart of this challenge is the requirement to change the practices, behaviour and mindset of many different people (staff, students and other stakeholders). Given its behavioural dimension, curriculum co-creation is an issue that will never be entirely 'solved' by leaders alone, but needs to be 'resolved' as part of an ongoing strategic commitment.

The emphasis on changing people's behaviour suggests that this particular leadership challenge is best framed as a wicked problem[53], a conceptualisation that generates key insights for leaders. Camillus[54], a seasoned observer of how companies create strategy, notes: 'wicked problems often crop up when organizations have to face constant change or unprecedented change'. He goes on to highlight: 'they occur in a social context; the greater the disagreement among stakeholders, the more wicked the problem', indeed, 'it is the social complexity of wicked problems as much as their technical difficulties that make them tough to manage'[55].

Encouraging and sustaining any form of innovation within a workforce, such as curriculum co-creation, is a good example of the sort of organisational challenges framed by this type of social complexity. While the goals associated with co-creation might be easily expressed, successful attainment is dependent on complex causal relationships between people. In these situations those involved will view the problem differently, while the solutions and resources associated with addressing the problem are likely to evolve over time[56]. The social complexity associated with wicked problems means that they can only be addressed if all relevant stakeholders are engaged and involved. For Camillus[57], 'the aim should be to create a shared understanding of the problem and foster a joint commitment to possible ways of resolving it'. Whilst he recognises that not everyone will agree on what the problem is, 'stakeholders should be able to understand one another's position well enough to discuss different interpretations of the problem and work together to tackle it'[58].

Co-creation as a necessary organisational strategy

The discussion of co-creation as a wicked problem is important as it underlines why this issue should be of central concern to university leaders. First, the ubiquity of wicked problems across society serves to underline why curriculum co-creation is vital to the pedagogical development of modern universities. To equip our students for the challenges of the 21st century, we need programmes that draw knowledge from a range of different perspectives and can quickly adapt to an external environment that is more volatile than ever. This is the reason why we were commissioned by the NHS and the Cabinet Office to deliver the co-created programmes discussed in this paper. Both of these institutions view co-creation as a crucial practice to underpin the development of their leaders in a world in which wicked problems are ubiquitous.

A second, related point is that the principles of co-creation need to be applied by university leaders when considering how they embed curriculum co-creation within their own organisations. Creating a co-creation culture requires leaders to engage in practices designed to encourage dialogue, collaboration and joint problem-solving amongst senior management, administrators, academics, students and potentially other stakeholders. Dialogue allows people to develop a common understanding of specific issues by converting tacit and individual knowledge into collective and shared knowledge[59], therefore enabling new solutions to emerge amongst the groups participating in the process[60]. In this context, stakeholder co-creation becomes the catalyst for curriculum co-creation in universities.

It is recognised that co-creation as a strategic approach to organisational development may generate developmental issues within some universities. Rather than more traditional command and control styles of leadership, co-creation requires senior staff to consider and apply different approaches; for example, as we have highlighted in the context of teaching delivery, how co-creation emphasises the importance of facilitation skills. It focuses on processes that foster rather than direct discussion, preferring approaches that enable participants to find their own answers[61]. Indeed, in a co-creation context, the focus for the leader is on the process of decision-making rather than any particular outcome.

59
Cunliffe (2002)

60
Tsoukas (2009)

61
Bens (2006)

A 'mental map' for university leaders

Our discussion of curriculum co-creation has covered a wide spectrum of issues. To help university leaders navigate the terrain around co-creation, the paper's key themes are now draw together in the learning points below which can be used to guide conversations around implementation and engagement strategies. This 'mental map' is designed to highlight the characteristics of curriculum co-creation and the key factors that underpin its successful practice:

- Curriculum co-creation is underpinned by the idea that subject knowledge is a shared resource best regarded as a commons.
- Greater value is created as more people (students, staff and other stakeholders) engage in the commons and join the learning community.
- To enrich the process, students become active partners in the learning process with academics; knowledge is co-created through intelligent participation which unfolds in cycles of dialogue and reflection.
- Good practice can be encouraged and disseminated in the university through pilot studies, improvisation and small-scale experimentation in different subject areas; learning that can be underpinned by experience from other institutions.
- Quality control processes for co-created curricula need to be governed by learning outcomes rather than specific course content.
- Co-creation generates development challenges and resource issues for teaching staff which require the intervention of leaders.
- Leaders should consider the creation of new roles and course structures to support co-created curricula.
- Successful delivery requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders who need to be engaged and informed about its benefits and challenges.
- Encouraging and sustaining curriculum co-creation requires a leadership commitment to co-created strategies and organisational problem-solving.

Conclusion

Co-creation requires greater emphasis being given to the experiences and problems of students and other stakeholders in curriculum design. The specific examples discussed in this paper involve our work with small groups of mature students as part of a professional Masters programme. Our experience here suggests that co-creation can transform positively the pedagogical experiences of students as they become involved in curriculum design and teaching as well as assessment. We would further suggest that these specific examples contain valuable lessons that can be applied to other contexts as well. First, the promise of co-creation must be followed up with tangible actions. This can manifest itself in different ways but requires the teaching team to act – and be seen to act – on the insights that these stakeholders bring. It moves the discussion beyond the idea of engagement and feedback in the context of a formal review to an activity, or range of activities, that are embedded in the programme itself. Second, co-creation requires both students and academics to make a leap of faith. It does not remove the tutor's expertise from the classroom, but it does emphasise their participation as a co-learner, as well as a facilitator rather than just a repository of learning from which knowledge can be drawn. For the student, it generates an additional set of responsibilities as a co-creator rather than a consumer of education.

It should also be noted that co-creation is not always positive or appropriate. University leaders therefore need to make judgements about those areas of the curriculum that are ripe for experimentation, innovation and development. However, the emphasis in the higher education green paper[62] on increasing student engagement and providing high-quality learning experiences suggests that university leaders should begin with the question of 'why not co-creation?' rather than 'why?'. Leaders then need to consider the issues around dissemination, engagement, process, governance, course structures and staff development that need to be addressed if institutional rhetoric is to be transformed into action. We would further add that reflecting on the challenges associated with curriculum co-creation can inform wider discussions around the other transformational pressures facing universities.

When considering the challenges associated with curriculum co-creation, it is important not to lose sight of its fundamental purpose and rationale. Co-creation represents a commitment by universities to equip students with the learning they need to cope with the complexity of the modern world. Curricula need to be negotiated to ensure their continuing relevance in a range of contexts, whether social, organisational, technological or personal. Co-created learning – between practice and academia, between faculty and students, between educators and employers, between leaders and others in the organisation – helps to make the journey rewarding and worthwhile.

62
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015)

References

Antonacopoulou, E.P. (2010). Making the business school more 'critical': Reflexive critique based on phronesis as a foundation for impact. British Journal of Management 21: S6–S25. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00679.

Arnstein, S.R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. Journal of the American Institute of Planners 35(4): 216–24.

Barber, M., Donnelly, K. & Rizvi, S. (2013). An avalanche is coming: Higher education and the revolution ahead. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Bens, I. (2006). Facilitating to lead: Leadership strategies for a networked world. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bollier, D. (2011). The growth of the commons paradigm. In Hess, C. & Ostrom, E. (eds) Understanding knowledge as a commons pp27–40. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Boshyk, Y., Barker, A.E. & Dilworth, R.L. (2010). Reg Revans: Sources of inspiration, practice and theory. In Boshyk, Y. & Dilworth, R. (eds) Action learning: History and evolution pp48–72. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bovill, C. (2013). An investigation of co-created curricula within higher education in the UK, Ireland and the USA. Innovations in Education and Teaching International. DOI: 10.1080/14703297.2013.770264.

Bovill, C. & Bulley, C.J. (2011). A model of active student participation in curriculum design: Exploring desirability and possibility. In Rust, C. (ed) Improving Student Learning 18: Global theories and local practices: Institutional, disciplinary and cultural variations pp176–88. Oxford: The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development.

Camillus, J.C. (2008). Strategy as a wicked problem. Harvard Business Review May: 99–106.

Cunliffe, A. (2002). Reflexive dialogical practice in management learning. Management Learning 33(1): 35–61.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015). Fulfilling our potential: Teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice. London: BIS. **www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474227/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice.pdf** [accessed 24 Jan 2016].

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Committee (2016). The Teaching Excellence Framework: Assessing quality in Higher Education. HC 572. London: House of Commons.

Department of Health (2009a). World Class Commissioning. London: Department of Health. **http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.dh.gov.uk/en/managingyourorganisation/commissioning/worldclasscommissioning/index.htm** [accessed 20 Jan 2016].

Department of Health (2009b). High quality care for all: NHS Next Stage Review final report. London: Department of Health. **www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228836/7432.pdf** [accessed 20 Jan 2016].

Department of Health (2009c). The Communicating Organisation. London: Department of Health.

Egan, M. (2014). Foreword. In Wall, D. The Commons in history: Culture, conflict and ecology ppxi–xv. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Fraser, S.P. & Bosanquet, A.M. (2006). The curriculum? That's just a unit outline, isn't it? Studies in Higher Education 31(3) June: 269–84.

Gärdebo, J. & Wiggberg, M. (eds) (2012). Students, the university's unspent resource: Revolutionising higher education through active student participation. Report series 12, Division for Development of Teaching and Learning, Uppsala University. **www.uadm.uu.se/upi/arkiv/rapporter/Rapport12.pdf** [accessed 26 Jan 2016].

Gregory, A. (2009). The Competencies of Senior Communicators in the UK National Health Service. Journal of Communication in Healthcare 2(2): 282–93.

Gregory, A. (2008). The Competencies of Senior Practitioners in the UK: an initial study. Public Relations Review 34(3): 215–23.

Hall, J.G. (2013). Editorial: Is tangled the new wicked? Expert Systems 30 May (2): 128.

Havergal, C. (2015). Should students be partners in curriculum design? Times Higher 17 Dec. **www.timeshighereducation.com/features/should-students-be-partners-in-curriculum-design** [accessed 5 Jan 2016].

Higher Education Academy (2014). Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education. York: Higher Education Academy.

Healey, M., Flint, A. & Harrington, K. (2014). Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. York: Higher Education Academy. **www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/pdfs/ukpga_20120007_en.pdf** [accessed 1 Dec 2013].

Heller, M.A. (1998). The tragedy of the anticommons: Property in the transition from Marx to markets. Harvard Law Review 111(3): 622–88.

Hess, C. & Ostrom, E. (2011). Introduction: An overview of the knowledge commons. In Hess, C. & Ostrom, E. (eds) Understanding knowledge as a commons 3–26. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Levy, P., Little, S. & Whelen, N. (2010). Perspectives on staff–student partnerships in learning, research and educational enhancement. In Little, S. (ed) Staff–student partnerships in higher education 1–15. London: Continuum.

McCulloch, A. (2009). The student as co-producer: Learning from public administration about the student–university relationship. Studies in Higher Education 34(2) March: 171–83.

McLoughlin, C. & Lee, M.J.W. (2008). The three P's of pedagogy for the networked society: Personalization, participation and productivity. International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 20(1): 10–27.

Neary, M. (2012). Student as producer: How do revolutionary teachers teach? Winchester: Zero Books.

NHS (2016). The NHS in England [online] **www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/thenhs/about/Pages/overview.aspx** [accessed 20 Jan 2016].

NUS (2012). A manifesto for partnership. London: National Union of Students. London: NUS. **http://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/16659/bf343f09e6fdd4c5a4f7392d0433f2d7/A%20Manifesto%20for%20Partnership.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJKEA56ZWKFU6MHNQ&Expires=1453734632&Signature=HzexIAIHHd4mHsRGpZQzhFtz06c%3D** [accessed 25 Jan 2016].

Public Relations Society of America (2006). The Professional Bond. New York, NY: PRSA.

Rittel, H.W. & Webber, M.M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. Policy Sciences 4: 155–69.

Tsoukas, H. (2009). A dialogical approach to the creation of new knowledge in organizations. Organization Science 20(6): 941–57.

Wall, D. (2014). The Commons in history: Culture, conflict and ecology. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Willis, P. (2015). Being social: Creating a critical commons with public relations practice. In L'Etang, J., McKie, D., Snow, N. & Xifra, J. (eds) The Routledge Handbook of Critical Public Relations pp383–92). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Willis, P. & McKie, D. (2011). Outsourcing public relations pedagogy: Lessons from innovation, management futures, and stakeholder participation. Public Relations Review 37: 466–69.

Acknowledgements

Paul and Anne would like to thank the many students, clients, colleagues and other professionals who made their excursions into the world of curriculum co-creation so rewarding.

Author biographies

Paul Willis

Paul Willis is a researcher and teacher of strategic communication at Leeds Business School (LBS), Leeds Beckett University. He works with professional communicators in Government, NGOs and the private sector. He teaches on the Government Communication Service *Inspire* programme and was the joint recipient of the National Communication Association PRIDE Award for outstanding contribution to public relations education. Paul is regularly invited to present at academic and professional conferences around the world on the subject of curriculum co-creation.

In addition to co-creating innovative Masters programmes with practitioners, Paul taught at the National School of Government and was appointed Visiting Lecturer for the MBA programme at Quadriga University in Berlin. He recently completed a major international research project on stakeholder engagement for the EU. In 2016, Paul was appointed a member of the Government's Future Communication Council by the Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office.

Paul held a number of leadership and board level positions in the private sector before joining LBS in 2008. He worked as a communication advisor for organisations including BMW, BT, Ernst & Young, RWE, Proctor & Gamble, Walmart, the NHS, UK Sport and The Football Association. Paul began his career in the UK Parliament before taking on an in-house public affairs role in The City of London. He then worked in Westminster as a political consultant.

Paul is an active researcher and his work can be found in leading academic journals and text books in his field. He is the co-author with Anne Gregory of *Strategic Public Relations Leadership* (Routledge, 2013) which explores the key facets of leadership for communication professionals. He is a Visiting Fellow at The University of Waikato in New Zealand, a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the Journal of Communication Management and on the Scientific Committee for the Annual Congress of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association.

Professor Anne Gregory

Professor Anne Gregory is Professor of Corporate Communication at the University of Huddersfield where she teaches and undertakes research and consultancy. During her academic career she has held numerous management and leadership roles including at pro-vice-chancellor level. Before becoming an academic Anne worked in both the private and public sector rising to a Board level position in a large consultancy firm.

Anne's teaching and research interests focus on capacity building in public relations and corporate communication and includes the strategic contribution of communication, ethics, leadership, and globalisation. She teaches programmes for public and private sector clients including the UK Cabinet Office and across Whitehall departments. She is a Reviewer of Departmental Communications for the UK Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office having completed three attachments and her work has led to Government policy documents and capacity building initiatives. She currently leads the *Senior Talent Programme* for the Government Communication Service which seeks to build capability in the most senior communicators.

Anne teaches on Masters and executive education programmes internationally in Scandinavia, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australasia. She is a Visiting Professor at the University of Navarra and CEU, Spain; Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland; the Management University of Singapore, Singapore and RMIT, Australia.

Anne is an internationally recognised researcher and is published widely in academic journals and books. With Paul Willis (co-author of this paper) she wrote *Strategic Public Relations Leadership* (Routledge, 2013). In 2015 she was awarded the Distinguished Pathfinder Award for research by the Institute for Public Relations in the USA, the only British academic to receive the award.

Professor Gregory is Immediate Past Chair of the Global Alliance, the world-wide body of over 60 national and international public relations associations which is a recognised NGO by the UN and a former President of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. She was awarded the Sir Stephen Tallents Medal in 2010 and made an Honorary Fellow of the CIPR in 2015 for her outstanding contribution to the profession. She is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Notes

Notes

Notes

Inspiring Leadership

Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

Stimulus paper

Connect with us:

Follow us on Twitter
@LF4HE

Join us on Facebook
LF4HE

Visit our blog
LFHEBlog.com

Join us on LinkedIn
LFHELinkedIn

Visit our website
www.lfhe.ac.uk

Inspiring Leadership
Leadership Foundation
for Higher Education

Peer House
8-14 Verulam Street
London
WC1X 8LZ

T +44 (0) 20 3468 4810
F +44 (0) 20 3468 4811
E info@lfhe.ac.uk
www.lfhe.ac.uk

recycle
Please consider your environmental responsibilities and, if printing this pdf recycle the hard copy after use.

August **2016**