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A competence-based approach

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The vulnerable user of the social services

Vulnerability arises from the interaction of personal characteristics (such as poverty, isolation, disability...) and external conditions. The user of social services is vulnerable if he feels powerless in a situation that requires competencies and resources that he cannot mobilize.

How can the service provider promote the service coproduction to reduce perceived vulnerability and improve service quality?

A case study in the reception service of a family benefice department (Caisse d'allocations familiales): 47 observations of interactions between users and front-line staff followed by 43 semi-structured interviews with the users.

Identify the competencies and the resources of the user in the coproduction of social service ...

User's competencies	Nature of the competencies	Internal and external resources
The user explains the situation or the problem	Basic competencies: prerequisites for the service coproduction The lack of these competencies increases the perceived vulnerability Explain a part of the non-appliance rate in the social services	Cognitive: ability to speak French, communicate, know its rights, process information, complete a form, be well organized ... Social: caregivers, social workers, Physical: means of transport, postal address, access to internet ...
The user understands the answer of front-line staff and the recommended actions		
The user questions the answer and/or anticipates the actions	Auxiliary competencies: not essential for the service coproduction but reflect the autonomy and the reflexivity of the user. He questions the rules and uses the tools to co-produce the service. Having these competencies decreases the perceived vulnerability.	Cognitive: specialized knowledge (administrative and legal rules), capacity to use alone different channels Psychological: self-confidence, shame management, emotional stability Social: user's network Physical: websites, documentation
The user knows the different tools in the reception service (front-line staff, self-service, website...) and the user's journey.		

... To improve the coproduction of the social services:

- **A design of reception policy based on the competencies of users**
 - Reception on appointment: users with the basic competencies;
 - Self-service (website, printer): users with all competencies;
 - Reception without appointment: users without basic competencies, often in an extreme situation of economic and social precariousness, or users with a punctual /new problem.
- **Interact with the users in social services is a real profession**
 - Front-line staff has significant technical and relational competencies;
 - Front-line staff is voluntary;
 - They promote the acquisition of internal resources and competencies by the user;
 - But the service provider has limited actions on certain resources.

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