Who is in the Lead? New Perspectives on Leading Service Co-Production

Hans Schlappa and Yassaman Imani

Introduction

Co-production theory implies that citizens and regular producers have to negotiate with, and adapt to, each other’s ideas on what should be done and how the skills and resources each brings to the process can best be utilised. If, as established theory implies, co-production is more than telling citizens what to do and expecting co-producers to follow established procedures and protocols, then regular and citizen co-producers have to make sense of what they are trying to achieve, negotiate potentially conflicting ideas on desired outcomes and how to achieve them, and then engage in the practical delivery of a co-produced service. The question of “who is in the lead?” when professionals and citizens come together to co-create and co-deliver a service goes to the heart of the analysis of the co-production process because leadership is about power to set and influence direction and to determine the way success and failure are assessed. Leadership is also about rationales and motivations for action and the context in which such actions happen. Hence leadership theory offers an insightful perspective on the actual mechanisms through which co-production is enacted.

Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Within the mainstream public leadership literature, leadership is considered to occur between independent actors of whom the leader is positioned hierarchically above others in the team or organisation. Here we find that two concepts dominate the theory in use by public administration scholars, namely transactional and transformational concepts of leading (Van Wart, 2003; Van Wart, 2013). The transactional perspective on leading gained popularity with the advent of the New Public Management paradigm where the logic of hierarchy and economic rationality prioritised leadership models that focused on issues concerned with efficiency, effectiveness and economy. This put an emphasis on performance management based on rewards that are contingent on the efforts made to achieve defined goals and resulted in giving preference to leadership styles that promised the
achievement of pre-defined outcomes (Bass, 1990; Moynihan and Thomas, 2013). Such a perspective on leading seems to have only limited application to co-production, not just because the instrumental-rational approach that is implied belies the active, process shaping role citizen co-producers can be expected to play, but also because the notion of citizens as passive consumers of services has been discredited as being based on the Fordist model of production where the complexities of human abilities, needs and desires are subordinated to management principles rooted in the logics of linear and mechanistic manufacturing processes (Osborne, 2010). Much of the criticism levelled at contemporary co-production practice found in this volume and elsewhere reflects a critique of rational-instrumental approaches to service provision and points to the tensions between the interest of professional regular producers intent on ensuring stability, avoiding risks, meeting commitments to cost, efficiency and quality standards versus the potential or actual contribution of the citizen co-producer in terms of ideas, expertise, knowledge and resources.

Transformational leadership theory, on the other hand, emphasises the values individuals in leadership positions hold and their ability to set out a vision that inspires followers to perform beyond expectation. It is a popular concept in contemporary management studies due to its largely unproven promise to bring about radical yet innovative and performance enhancing change in public as well as private sector organisations (Andrews and Boyne, 2010). Edwards and Turnbull (2013) contrast the transactional leader as someone working within a given culture to achieve pre-determined goals, with the transformational leader who changes culture and sets new directions. However, at its core transformational leadership is concerned with organisational change that is grounded in networks of leadership relations which cross organisational and professional boundaries (Currie and Lockett, 2007). Both the transactional and transformational perspective on leadership remain relevant for the study as well as the practice of leading public services in that they provide some explanatory frameworks for contemporary challenges the leaders of public service organisations encounter as well as influencing most leadership development programmes in both private and public sectors. Leadership of the co-production process, however, is not primarily concerned with the management of organisations; it is about the interactions that occur between regular and citizen co-producers. To surface and better understand the dynamics at work in co-production practice and to distinguish between effective and less effective practices, we require a critical relational perspective which draws on distributed leadership theory.

**Distributed Leadership**

Leadership of the co-production process is about meaning making, persuasion and negotiation between regular and citizen co-producers in a context of unequal power relationships. Leading co-production is therefore a
shared responsibility where citizens and paid staff aim to combine the skills, resources and authority of one another to accomplish a particular task. Such a relational perspective on leadership suggests that regular producers do not hold a privileged position in relation to citizens, casting them into the role of followers of an appointed, or self-appointed, leader with power to reward or punish. Theory of distributed leadership builds on a perspective which perceives leading as an activity which is shared and dispersed throughout teams and organisations. Bolden et al. (2008) define distributed leadership as:

... a less formalized model of leadership where leadership responsibility is dissociated from the organizational hierarchy. It is proposed that individuals at all levels in the organization and in all roles can exert leadership influence over their colleagues and thus influence the overall direction of the organization.

(ibid, p. 11)

Of the abundance of terms used to describe this phenomenon, shared and distributed leadership are the most common (for a review, see Bolden, 2011). Despite the variety of perspectives they represent, both terms build on the notion that leadership is an emergent property of interacting individuals and that expertise is distributed across the actors, not controlled by a few individuals in privileged positions (Bennett et al., 2003). A distributed leadership perspective offers insights into the mechanisms through which leadership functions might be shared. For example, MacBeath et al. (2004) identify that distributed leadership can have its roots in formal distribution (i.e. through its delegation), pragmatic distribution (i.e. through negotiation and division between actors), strategic distribution (i.e. shaped by the inclusion of people with specific skills or knowledge), incremental (i.e. where leadership is progressively enacted against experience), opportunistic (i.e. the ad hoc acceptance of responsibility) or cultural (the natural and organic assumption and sharing of responsibility). Similarly, Spillane (2006) points to differences in distribution of leadership functions, such as between collaborated distribution (individuals work together in time and place to execute leadership routines), collective distribution (individuals work separately but interdependently to enact leadership routines) or coordinated distribution (individuals work in sequence in order to complete leadership routines). Leithwood et al. (2006) consider how leadership is distributed in such ways that can either lead to “alignment” or “misalignment” based upon the extent to which the resulting formations of responsibilities within groups of actors achieve shared group purposes, and do so efficaciously.

While distributed leadership resonates with the principles of co-production, the conceptual frames it relates to require an extension because theory is premised on the principle that leading is shared among regular producers of an organisation—the notion that citizens are among those who enact
leadership within the organisation is not acknowledged in the distributed leadership literature. This points to a significant gap in the explanatory frameworks we have to hand when it comes to service co-production. For example, citizen co-producers are not professionals, yet according to distributed leadership theory professionals would need to share leadership functions with citizens. Furthermore, citizen co-producers are likely to have superior knowledge of problems and access to skills and resources which enhance the capabilities of service organisations to address them, but citizens are not bound by organisational controls in the same way as regular producers. Bolden (2011) acknowledges that the tendency to confine leadership studies within organisational boundaries with a sole focus on staff to the exclusion of external stakeholders represents a significant gap in research and weakens the explanatory power of the theory on distributed leadership. He calls for: “... a more critical perspective which facilitates reflection on the purpose(s) and discursive mechanisms of leadership and an awareness of the dynamics of power and influence in shaping what happens within and outside organizations” (Bolden, 2011, 263). In the remainder of this chapter we present a new way to conceptualise leadership in the context of the co-production process that is based on critical relational leadership theory.

A Critical Relational Perspective on Leading Co-Production

The emphasis that the concept of co-production places on collaboration between professionals and citizens suggests that leading co-production should be seen as a relational and interdependent process, in contrast to assuming that services are led through hierarchical and rational relationships between independent individuals. Yet, constructing a new perspective on leadership in the context of service co-production faces a number of conceptual as well as practical challenges: First, actors who intend to co-produce services cannot be considered independent from each other because their interdependence shapes the contexts as well as the process through which service outputs and outcomes are produced. Hence any exploration of the co-production process needs to acknowledge that two very different types of actors who have different, perhaps conflicting, motivations and expectations need to make sense of the purpose, means and outcomes of their collaboration. Second, citizen co-producers are not bound by organisational controls in the same way that regular producers are, i.e. they cannot easily be made to perform the role of co-producer if they do not feel able or reluctant to do so; neither is their contribution easily regulated or likely to fit into particular procedures and performance measures public service organisations maintain to manage and support their professional staff. Hence leading co-production requires an approach that is different to leading professionals, teams, organisations and networks if the motivations, expertise, knowledge and resources of citizen co-producers are to be harnessed. Third, questions about leadership are not confined to managerial
and organisational issues. Where co-production is the declared aim, the exploration of how regular and citizen co-producers lead the process goes to the heart of questions aimed at understanding how co-production mechanisms work. By asking “who is in the lead” we are more likely to surface collaborative practices, evaluate them and develop guidance on effective practices that foster co-production than by applying normative frameworks on leadership which do not seem to reflect the relational nature of the co-production process.

We suggest that leadership in co-production is best explored from a critical relational perspective (Hosking et al., 2012b) on leadership, which draws on distributed leadership theory (Gronn, 2002; Gronn, 2009; Thorpe et al., 2011). Such a perspective focuses on interactions through which realities are co-constructed and provides the conceptual tools to explore issues such as motivations, structure and power, which are central to understanding collaborations between actors who aim to accomplish something together (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Hosking et al., 2012a; Ospina et al., 2012; Shamir, 2012). A critical relational perspective on leading co-production encourages us to focus on actions and power dynamics among professional and citizen co-producers in the context in which they occur. From this perspective, leading co-production poses distinctive challenges that those involved need to mediate. We put forward here suggestions as to how regular and citizen co-producers might approach and make sense of leading service co-production. These include:

• Deliberately exploring the often conflicting goals and motivations co-producers bring to the process. A growing body of literature points to the complex range of motivations which citizens and officials bring to co-producing relationships and that are open to influence and change according to context and purpose of the co-production process (van Eijk and Steen, 2014; Vanleene et al., 2015). It is essential, therefore, that leading co-production includes a focus on nurturing opportunities for dialogue about the content and purpose of co-production, as well as challenging assumptions and expectations that are rooted in different knowledge and expertise professional and citizen co-producers bring to the co-production situation.

• Where possible, minimising the restrictions and rules which constrain discussions and actions between co-producers. Government together with other external and internal stakeholders will continue to impose constraints which make collaborations between officials and citizens difficult, but research presented in this volume shows that public organisations can create spaces that minimise such constraints and are “lightly structured” (Hosking et al., 2012b). Citizen co-producers need to have opportunities to shape a context conducive to participating in the provision of services, regardless of whether they are core or complementary to the functions of the organisation (Brandsen and Honingh, 2016).
Understanding and accepting that power is relational and negotiated (Stacey, 2007; van Der Haar and Hosking, 2004) between people who co-produce a service. Although citizen co-producers are often portrayed as being “un-empowered” (van Eijk and Steen, 2015; van Eijk and Steen, 2014), there are also arguments which show that power shifts between official and citizen co-producers according to their expertise, knowledge, resources, position and other contextual factors (Tuurnas, 2016). This changes perceptions of the co-producer relationship from one where the official “is in the lead” to one where leadership and associated expressions of power are negotiated and dynamic.

Adopting a critical relational perspective reveals co-production as an emergent and negotiated process where institutional structure, motivations and power dynamics between professionals and citizens are of central importance. Such a perspective might sensitise both the regular co-producers, who tend to perceive themselves as having to maintain standards, as well as the citizen co-producers, who often feel unempowered to change the service system, to their interdependencies and the power each holds over the process.

Challenges of Leading Co-production

A clear focus on power, motivations and context when regular and citizen co-producers interact encourages both scholars and practitioners to ask questions about the contingent and dynamic aspects of public administration systems and complements the more normative analytical frameworks on leadership in use. However, leading co-production is a contested process, not only because citizens and officials bring values, attitudes and beliefs to co-production efforts which are not necessarily in tune with each other, but also because they are also hard to change. The critical relational approach towards leading advocated here challenges many assumptions inherent in professional practice about control, accountability and standards (Tuurnas, 2015). Resistance to sharing leadership is not only rooted in the comfort and certainty that traditional models of leading service provision bring to regular producers, but there is a clear threat that lack of formal authority in co-ordinating work activities is likely to give rise for increased power struggles and conflicts between those involved. In the absence of traditional approaches to leading, deadlines might not be kept and lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities might result in slower decision making processes. Furthermore, misunderstandings between actors might increase, resulting in reduced cohesion, which would make it more difficult to establish consensus, thus making those involved in co-production less effective and productive.

However, the literature on leadership development in public service organisations points to a number of practices that facilitate sharing leadership functions. In particular reflective practices, such as reflecting on leading...
the self, growth in connection with others and soft relational skills associated with coaching and mentoring have been found effective in fostering relational perspectives on leading and sharing leadership functions in practice (Woods, 2015; Woods, 2004). The table below attempts to capture behaviours that are likely to foster or lead to resistance in adopting shared leadership practices. The idea here is that not all co-production situations can be led by adopting a relational approach; at times it might be necessary for either party to tell and explain in no uncertain terms what needs to happen, in the case of facing a medical emergency for example. Hence the columns here do not present binary choices, but should be seen as a heuristic to the range of actions and responses possible and as a framework for assessing the extent to which observed behaviours support or hinder co-production efforts.

Co-production theory implies that citizen and regular producers have to negotiate with, and adapt to, each other’s ideas on what should be co-produced and how the skills and resources each brings to the process can best be utilised. The process of co-producing therefore cannot be conceived as being primarily top-down, where organisational priorities or professional judgements determine what happens. Neither can it be primarily a bottom-up process where citizens take control. In regard to co-production research and practice we need to challenge assumptions that the power and ability to determine processes and outcomes reside within independent individuals. Instead we need to recognise that co-producers are interdependent and rely on each other to achieve the outcomes each is aiming for.

## Conclusion

Exploring how co-production works requires attention to interdependencies between individuals, organisations, service systems and networks. While the growing body of literature on co-production is advancing our

### Table 9.1 Behaviours that are Likely to Foster or Lead to Resistance in Adopting Shared Leadership Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading one another based on a relational perspective would entail:</th>
<th>Leading the other based on a hierarchical perspective would entail:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asking Conversations Trusting Reflective practice Belief in collectivity Shared responsibility Shared sense of purpose Adaptive process Emergent outcomes</td>
<td>Telling Explanations Transacting Evidence based practice Belief in hierarchy Self interest Personal vision Rigid process Pre-defined outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
understanding of these interdependencies, leadership is one factor that is often overlooked yet offers a valuable perspective on the actual mechanisms through which CP is enacted. A critical relational perspective encourages us to perceive leadership as distributed and collective, rather than residing with individuals, shaping and being shaped by context and having shared sense of purpose and respect for desired outcomes. Such a lens fits well with contemporary notions of “public leadership” whereby authority and responsibility associated with leading communities, public policy and organisations is distributed horizontally across and vertically within organisations (Brookes and Grint, 2010). However, this marks a distinct departure from established perspectives on leadership found in public administration research which are rooted in assumptions that control and power resides with independent individuals or groups where one has power and control over the other.

References


9.1 Case Study—Leading Co-Production
The Case of Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service’s Community Volunteer Scheme

Yassaman Imani and Hans Schlappa

Introduction
This case study illustrates the shifting leadership and control in co-production of preventative services by a voluntary scheme in HFRS (Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Services). More specifically, it demonstrates how citizen co-producers can exercise some control and lead initiatives despite HFRS’s rigid structure and its command and control culture.

The UK fire and rescue services have become a victim of their own success in achieving their core organizational goals, namely reducing fires. This success together with two other factors, namely, a vision of a fire service that is more closely integrated with other emergency services (e.g., ambulance, police, health and social care services) and the UK government’s harsh austerity measures after the 2008 global financial crisis imposed an average budget reduction of 28% on the fire and rescue services between 2010 and 2015 (National Audit Office, 2014). The case of HFRS’s pioneering CVS (Community Volunteer Scheme) illustrates leadership in co-production practice, as a long-term budgetary austerity turned a small complementary service into a core service provided and co-produced by volunteers.

How the Scheme is Organized
The CVS was launched in January 2008, initially in response to the then UK’s Labour Government policy of promoting social inclusion because volunteers were expected to enhance engagement with difficult to reach communities, especially concerning fire prevention initiatives. From 2010 onwards, the purpose of the scheme changed as a result of the austerity measures by the UK government that cut the budget for preventative services by 47.1% in real terms. This inadvertently created a strategic role for the scheme to deliver a core service.

Volunteers receive extensive training to undertake home safety checks and other specialized training (Hertfordshire County Council s.d). Currently the scheme has 105 regular volunteers who dedicate at least 6 hours
of their time each month and deliver a wide range of preventative services such as home fire safety checks, arson patrols, attending school fairs, working alongside trading standards officers from the municipality and other specialized services (Hertfordshire County Council s.d). In 2014/15 the CVS provided 31,000 hours of volunteer working time, providing a range of services of which home safety visits and street patrols feature most highly. Their work also interlinks with trading standards inspections, public events and educational campaigns, which means that the scheme has grown into a core service on which the HFRS heavily relies.

Leading Co-Production in Practice

The first challenge managers faced was how to set up a volunteering scheme on which they could not impose the control mechanisms used for regular employees of their hierarchical force. Eventually, they decided that it should be largely independent from the mainstream service with one officer (the scheme manager) providing the link between paid staff and volunteers. The lists of required jobs come down from the scheme manager, who collects them from local fire stations from across the county, but how and when they are carried out is organized locally and facilitated by an experienced volunteer with no formal authority other than a nominal title. This structure effectively enabled some distribution of leadership within the co-production process. Both the scheme manager and volunteers perceived that the delivery process was controlled by fire service protocols, rules and structures, so when we asked the volunteers who was leading, they all named the scheme manager. Interestingly, the scheme manager said he could only exercise his positional power over the paid staff but relied heavily on soft skills, which he said were “basically the opposite of all I had learnt in leadership development courses”. Volunteers also felt they just carried out orders because preventative services are pre-designed and controlled by detailed protocols, but in fact they took leading roles in some situations. The volunteers had joined the scheme “to give something back to the society” but all were surprised by the scale and scope of the unexpected physical and mental health problems, isolation and other problems they came across. A volunteer told us: “No matter what you’re doing your knowledge and your sensibility tell you there’s something else here. So you address that issue as well. . . . We do use our initiatives”. Some volunteers felt that they worked as “operating in a bubble”, a reflection of both their limited interactions with the mainstream service provided by paid staff and the inherent tension between a hierarchical structure where the professional retains control over the design and delivery of the service, and a semi self-organizing “light” structure which facilitated the sharing of leadership roles between regular and citizen co-producers. To deliver a core fire prevention service, volunteers would follow the rigid protocol designed by professionals but in the “light structured” part of their work when they entered people’s homes they would change
the nature of the service significantly if they came across unexpected issues. In these unpredictable situations, volunteers take the lead using their own judgments and “making a difference”. This was the unpredictable, uncat-
egorized dimension of a pre-designed core service that enabled volunteers to lead a particular part of the service process, which in practice required a flexible approach to leadership. However, both regular and citizen co-
producers underplayed how leadership would shift between them depending on situations. Volunteers tended to downplay their considerable influence on the co-production process and put it down to their “spirit of limitless time”, which they felt the regular firefighters did not have. In practice, this meant that citizen-led co-production could provide a holistic approach which necessitated and put in effect a more distributed leadership.

Conclusion

This case study highlights the dynamic nature of co-production where both regular and citizen co-producers take the lead, even if citizen co-producers do not acknowledge their leading roles. The CVS has effectively and successfully co-produced a core service and in the process both regular and citizen co-producers have taken leading roles and developed unique understanding of the needs of their communities. Yet, despite its obvious potential benefits to a cash strapped public service provider, the scheme’s future remains uncertain and might even get closed down despite governments’ new integrated service policy, which would benefit highly from it.

References

Hertfordshire County Council. (s.d.). Fire Service Volunteers Make a Real Difference (online).

9.2 Case Study—Enhancing Co-Creation Through Linking Leadership
The Danish ‘Zebra City’ Project

Anne Tortzen

Introduction
Co-production and co-creation are currently high on the strategic agenda of Danish municipalities and a range of initiatives are launched by public managers to enhance collaboration with citizens and public service users. This case study describes a community development initiative in the Danish municipality of Roskilde labelled ‘The Zebra City project’. The project is a case of complementary co-creation, where the municipality set out to facilitate a range of citizen-driven collaborative activities with the aim of strengthening social capital in a ‘vulnerable’ local community. Through a ‘linking’-type of leadership, the ‘Zebra City’ initiative succeeded in linking a variety of actors, goals and interests, thereby enhancing the co-creation process.

The ‘Zebra City’ project has been initiated, framed and facilitated by civil servants from the municipality of Roskilde, categorizing it as a ‘top-down’ co-creation initiative. The case study explores how the hands-off (governing) and hands-on (facilitating) leadership interventions enacted by the public administrators influenced the co-creation initiative, illustrating some general conclusions in terms of the link between leadership and co-creation (Tortzen, 2016). Firstly, the hands-off leadership interventions exercised by the public agencies are central to top-down co-creation processes. Secondly, top-down co-creation processes tend to take place within a cross pressure of governance logics. In the case of ‘Zebra City’, a ‘linking’ strategy was applied that reflexively coped with this pressure by linking interests, actors and governance logics, thereby enhancing the co-creation process.

Background
The ‘Zebra City’ initiative took place in a ‘vulnerable’ public housing community in Roskilde characterized by social problems and a relatively high proportion of immigrant inhabitants. The initiative was part of the municipality’s strategic ambition to innovate public welfare and solve complex problems by mobilizing local resources (Roskilde Kommune, 2012). It was
aimed at empowering the local citizens and strengthening the social networks between local actors in the area by bringing them together in a range of activities.

The hands-off leadership of the ‘Zebra City’ was characterized by a tension between governance regimes expressed in terms of two conflicting framings of the initiative. On the one hand, the initiative was framed by the top managers according to a New Public Governance understanding, i.e. awarding the municipality a role of facilitating ‘network- and community-building’ and the ‘creation of synergy among local resources’. The designation ‘Zebra City’ also draws on this understanding, as the zebra is described as a particularly social animal that tends to protect the weakest individuals of the community.

On the other hand, however, the top management of the municipality framed the ‘Zebra City’ project in terms of a number of performance targets derived from a New Public Management understanding. Project targets were set in terms of a certain number of activities initiated locally, a certain number of citizens engaged in these activities and a wish to increase the number of citizens participating in existing local voluntary organizations. At the same time the politicians wanted the ‘Zebra City’ project to serve as a platform for their personal meetings with local citizens. Conclusively, the initiative was characterized by governance tensions and a complexity of goals and interests (Törtzen, 2016).

This tension was handled through the hands-on leadership of the ‘Zebra City’ project in terms of facilitating collaboration between a variety of local actors. The hands-on leadership was mainly exercised by the project manager, who was well aware of the tensions and different interests to be handled in the process. Drawing on her anthropological background, she applied a ‘linking strategy’ aiming at linking citizens and public administrators from different sectors with different interests, goals and resources through collaboration.

Experiences

The ‘linking leadership’ interventions performed by the project manager turned out to enhance the co-creation process. A so called ‘Zebra Day’ was arranged early in the process inviting all local citizens to attend and opening the doors of the local public institutions such as the school and kindergarten, the health center and nursing home.

Furthermore, the project manager facilitated a range of activities driven by local citizens and organizations, and the ‘Zebra Day’ was attended by the mayor and other local politicians. Thereby the ‘Zebra Day’ served both as a visible event, network building activity and a platform for the politicians to meet local citizens.

Other ‘linking leadership’ interventions consisted in actively including marginalized groups in the project by reaching out to immigrant citizens...
and the inhabitants of a local social psychiatric institution, who were invited to participate by cooking meals for other Zebra participants. Furthermore, the ‘linking leadership’ performed by the project manager resulted in a number of local activities, i.e. setting up a local choir, establishing an urban garden and a ‘flea market for nerds’. Notably, some of these activities were citizen-initiated and -driven, facilitated by the ‘Zebra City’ project. The urban garden is an example of a citizen-initiated and -driven project which, according to one of the initiators, a woman with a severe stress diagnosis, would not have been realized without the ‘Zebra City’ initiative: “I would not have been able to do this on my own. Many of us have scratches, cracks and dents, but we give what we have” (Tortzen, 2016).

The ‘Zebra City’ co-creation initiative has been evaluated mainly positively by the participants, stressing the development of stronger relations among the inhabitants across ethnic groups as well as among the public servants working in the local area. By facilitating collaborative activities among local citizens, voluntary organizations and public administrators, this initiative succeeded in linking different actors, goals and interests. Thereby simultaneously the project succeeded in meeting the municipal performance targets and contributing to the strengthening of local networks and of individual citizens. It served as an opportunity for vulnerable citizens to take the role as co-initiators and co-designers supported and facilitated by the municipality.

References