9 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.

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

Leading one another based on a relational perspective would entail:	*Leading the other based on a hierarchical perspective would entail:*
Asking	Telling
Conversations	Explanations
Trusting	Transacting
Reflective practice	Evidence based practice
Belief in collectivity	Belief in hierarchy
Shared responsibility	Self interest
Shared sense of purpose	Personal vision
Adaptive process	Rigid process
Emergent outcomes	Pre-defined outcomes

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

understanding of these interdependencies, leadership is one factor that is often overlooked yet offers a valuable perspective on the actual mechanisms through which co-production 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.

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