Leadership in the Co-production of Public Services:
An initial conceptual framework

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1. Introduction

This paper builds on a number of earlier papers aimed at developing a conceptual framework to better understand the process of co-production in relation to leadership and organisational structure. The argument advanced here is twofold: First, that leadership must be shared to some extend for co-production to take effect and that this highlights the importance of relational dynamics in the exploration of the co-production process. Second, to develop models of leadership which reflect the nature of the co-production process we need to explore the extent to which power and institutional structure influence co-production.

We begin by making the argument that leadership and power are central dimensions of bureaucracies which are accountable for the use of public sector funding which makes the sharing of power and leadership with citizens problematic. This is followed by a review of current research on co-production which is an initial and preliminary attempt at categorising current literature according to the extent to which leadership, power and structure feature in conceptual frameworks or analytical debate. We then provide an initial taxonomy of key leaderships and complexity theories which support the development of a proposal on how dimensions of leadership and institutional structure in co-production could be studied.

2. Why focus on leadership and structure in co-production?

Scholars from different fields of study, as well as European policy makers, recognise that the magnitude and complexity of socio-economic challenges we face require collaborative responses (Alford and O'Flynn 2012; Austin and Seitanidi 2012; Evers and Laville 2004; Osborne 2010). In developing conceptual links between co-production, governance and civil society Pestoff points to important impacts that can results from collaborative service provision, such as including citizen empowerment, strengthening representative democracy and institutional change among public sector agencies (Pestoff 2009, 2012b). The growing number of empirical studies employing the conceptual lens of co-production support such arguments and seem to suggest that the co-production of social services might become a catalyst which changes the way in which societies govern and service themselves (Farmer et al. 2012; Pestoff et al. 2012). However, while the rapidly growing body of research on co-

production must be welcomed, it is unclear to what extent the accumulation of case studies will bring about change in the way public agencies approach the design and delivery of government funded welfare services. To advance the argument of co-production we need to connect and systematise descriptions of incidents of co-production to recognised bodies of theories. This paper attempts to develop a conceptual framework rooted in organisation and management theory.

The argument that organisations in the public, voluntary and private sector are progressively less reflective of their 'ideal types' (Billis 2010; Brandsen and Pestoff 2008) helps us explain how imposed or negotiated institutional adjustments affect collaborative welfare provision (Bode 2006; Brandsen and van Hout 2006). Much current research on co-production reflects a perspective on blurred institutional boundaries, but then makes a leap to suggest that social enterprises, not-for-profit organisations or self-help groups (the term TSO is used here to describe these) would be best placed to lead on the co-production process. Such assertions seem to underplay the significance of the nature of the relationship between the regular 'professional' producer who controls public resources and the 'citizen' co-producer who wants to draw on these resources. The challenges arising from this are well documented and there is a danger that much of existing research on TSO-public sector relationships will be duplicated with merely the label of co-production being superimposed on them.

Furthermore, organisational theory recognises that the way in which organisations respond to external influences depends on their characteristics and that these responses can vary significantly between imposed and negotiated adjustments (Di Maggio and Powell 1983, 1991; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), but the existing research on co-production is rather mute on this point. There is an implicit assumption that decisions associated with the co-production of welfare services are arrived at by mutual agreement, but we find little explicit exploration of this important aspect of co-production. Given the large body of literature which links the impositions of budgets, targets and performance indicators to fractuous and often exploitative relationships between public agencies and TSOs (see for example Harris 2010; Schlappa 2012b; Taylor et al. 2007; Zimmer and Priller 2004) it must be a priority for scholars to establish whether co-productive service provision is of a different quality. A deeper analysis of the co-production process is required for this. For example, Pestoff (2012a) provides a number of examples which illustrate that governments respond to the dilemma of wanting to improve welfare services but lacking the capacity to do so by themselves, by 'granting the right' to parents to set up child care co-operatives (ibid. p.28). While in the case of Sweden such approaches to collaboration between regular and co-

producers might be entirely benevolent and appropriate, very similar approaches to the establishment of free schools in the UK might have more sinister undertones and implications (Sahlgren, 2011; Hicks, 2011). Examples from the current co-production literature also point to the need for a deeper exploration of the co-production process. Vamstad (2012) for example points to the resistance of professionals to engage in co-production and Bovaird and Löffler (2012) argue that a key issue for the further development of co-productive practice is the lack of skills and a tendency for risk aversion among public officials.

Co-production as collective action between government funded officials and citizens, or governmental and non-governmental organisations would appear to require a space 'outside' government controlled institutions, or at least a space that can be 'shared' by different actors to create an environment where different actors can contribute their knowledge and power to the co-production process. Concepts around the 'blurring' of organizational and sectoral boundaries offer a useful perspective on the spaces for co-production which might be created by a softening of organizational boundaries. In the absence of a neutral 'shared' space for actors to co-produce services, the organization hosting the co-production of a publicly funded service is likely to have an advantage in being able to lead the process in ways which reflect organizational or personal priorities. The well documented tensions between third sector and public sector organizations show that questions about the locus of co-production are of critical importance: Is it public agencies which are 'hosting' the co-production process and are therefore perceived as deriving direct benefit from the contribution of citizens? Is it TSOs who benefit from the input of co-producing public servants, or is there the possibility of a space outside organisations where co-production becomes what the theory suggest, a mutually shared process which demonstrates that both parties benefit? Questions that follow from this would include: What structures would enable government to engage effectively in the co-production process with citizens or are organisational structures largely irrelevant because co-production happens in spaces outside or between organizations?

A related issue is leadership. The concept of co-production is based on notions of participation, engagement and empowerment (Bolden 2011) and therefore leans towards theories of collective or 'distributed' leadership. Concepts of distributed leadership support the argument that leadership can no longer be perceived as being primarily the role of an individual because it is inherently emergent and reliant on a range of actors who continuously negotiate collective action. This relates to an important contemporary debate on the provision of public services. Suggestions that there is only limited 'sharing' of

leadership and a tendency to assume control of and manage partnerships in ways which deliver desired service or performance outcomes (Currie et al. 2009; Currie et al. 2011) point to the need for a different conceptualisation of leadership in the public sector if more collaborative form of services provision are intended (Grint 2005; Lawler 2007). From this perspective, relational dynamics rather than organizational structures appear to be the important variables that facilitate co-production. This leads to questions about the nature of leadership in the co-production of public services: Can there be a 'leader' in the co-production process? Given that distributed leadership implies 'the dynamic interaction of leader, followers and the situation' (Spillane 2006) can government officials could discharge their responsibility and accountability for public resources in such situations? A related question is that of power which is axiomatic of leadership in any context (Jackson and Parry 2011): Can power be negotiated and shared in a co-production relationship between public officials and citizens?

To encourage the co-production of welfare services between regular producers and citizens, concrete models are needed which assist those in involved in service provision to 'visualise' how this co-production process might be started and sustained. Some or all of the above questions would need to be answered to do achieve this. It would be equally important to establish to what extent co-production is different or similar to other well researched forms of collaborative practice, such as partnership working, outsourcing, contracting or grant funding. Hence there is a substantial research agenda to be tackled. To contribute to the development of a 'research strategy on co-production' we are proposing here a conceptual framework for the exploration of the co-production process which utilises a critical relational perspective. This will be presented following the preliminary categorisation of current research on co-production in the next section.

3. Preliminary Categorisation of Relevant Literature

In this attempt to categorise current literature on co-production according to presence of references to leadership, power and structure we have drawn only on the contributions to the recently published volume on co-production edited by Pestoff, Brandsen and Vershuere (2012) in part because of time constraints, but also to facilitate discussion at this developmental stage of this paper. As many conference participants have contributed to the volume it is anticipated that in-depth discussions on the different dimensions of leadership, power and structure during the workshop will inform the next iteration of this paper.

The table below provides an overview of the extent to which individual contributions in the volume edited by Pestoff, Brandsen and Verschuere (Pestoff et al. 2012) referred to

concepts of leadership, power or structure. Indication by authors about the need for further research on these issues are also included.

Table 1: Reference to leadership, power and structure in current debate on co-production

Author	Topic	Reference to Leadership, power or structure
Pestoff	Self-organising and collective childcare (among others)	Joint decision making and solidarity. Public agencies exercise control by 'permitting' or 'requesting' contributions from citizens. More research on self-help groups to explore self-organisation in co-production.
Bovaird and Löffler	Public value chain	Barriers to co-production include risk aversion and need for control by officials. Officials control public resources when engaging in co-production relationships.
Ewert and Evers	Healthcare systems	Leadership and control exercised by clinicians Need for user empowerment to facilitate co-production of health outcomes.
Vaillancourt	Public Policy	Public agencies encourage TSO inclusion in service provision but exclude them in co-construction of policy.
Ackerman	Governance	Power to control resources and processes together with accountability of public agencies limits citizens' ability to influence the design and delivery of policy.
Cahn and Gray	Poverty and Time Banks	Existing systems are designed to control resources and service delivery rather than to facilitate co-production.
Porter	Education	Student-teacher relationship is reciprocal, interdependent and based on mutual adjustments.
Brandsen and Helderman	Social Housing	Management of conflicts arising from collective and individual interests is essential. Management of co-operative structures in ways which give power/influence to residents is good practice. Residents have the power to dismiss managers.
Meijer	New Media	No explicit reference to leadership, power or structure.
Brown et al	Social Innovation and Homelessness	No explicit reference to leadership, power or structure.
Schlappa	Regeneration	Control of resources and processes by officials or their agents. Exercise of power through hierarchy, separate structures and contractual relations. Programme managers have choices about sharing leadership and control functions. Shared leadership, shared structures, refraining from exercising legitimate power. More research on interactions between co-producers of services needed.
Dezeure and De Rynck	Relations between Citizens and Public Agencies	Government should utilise its power and expertise better to support citizen initiatives. Explore what type of organisational structure best supports co-production. Officials play crucial role in blocking or facilitating co-production. More research on role of civil servants needed.
Freise	Community Safety	Legitimacy and accountability requirements encourage hierarchical and public sector led approaches to policy

		development and implementation.
Tsukamoto	Partnerships	No explicit reference to leadership or power in partnership structures and processes.
Vamstad	Service Quality	Power distance between professionals and service users defines lines of accountability and can be a barrier to co-production. Opposition of professional staff to co-producing services with citizens.
Calabrò	Privatisation	No explicit reference to leadership, power or structure.
Vancoppenolle and Vershuere	Accountability	Need for changes in traditional accountability structures if co-production is to flourish. Contractual relations cement power of funders. Control and performance management systems. encourage regulation and control of co-production processes.
Pestoff	Power and Influence of Citizen Co-producers	Democracy and participative power of citizens is enhanced through co-production. Need to empower citizens to design and deliver more public services. Routine decision of civil servants require further exploration

This cursory review of contemporary literature concerned specifically with co-production shows a substantial diversity in the way that power and structure is perceived to be involved in co-production. References range from the power of citizens to influence service design and delivery through participative democratic processes, to the power of public agencies and their civil servants in including or excluding co-producers in decision making and the use of public resources. None of the contributions reviewed makes explicit reference to leadership in the co-production process and there are limited specific suggestions about how the process through which officials and citizens or TSOs co-produce services. Could be explored.

The taxonomy overleaf presents an initial attempt to pull together theoretical frameworks concerned with distributed leadership and complexity which is used in the next section to construct arguments about how leadership in co-production could be studied.

Table 2: Insights drawn from management and organization studies

A. Ontological and epistemological orientation	Insights offered	Contributions to the framework
Common orientation *Critical relational social constructionism* (Hosking, 2007; Van de Haar & Hosking, 2004)	• Regards realities as multiple, local-historical constructions in language or other actions • Critical aspect relates to the paradoxical nature of power (enabling and constraining), and stresses the importance of researcher reflexivity	• Explicit philosophical positioning • Allow researchers to explore how shared understandings, power relations, consensus and contentions about co-produced services emerge in interactions • Offers a congruent base for other insights used in developing this framework
B. Theories		
Distribute leadership		
1. Gronn, P. (2002), Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis, *The Leadership Quarterly, 13, 423-45*	• Regards leadership as a *process* and proposes DL as a unit of analysis • Argues that DL is well-aligned with the understanding of work as emerging and ever-changing division of labour (p, 425); • DL results from, 'spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, and institutionalized practices' (pp. 446–447) • 'To take a processual approach to leadership means to acknowledge that organization is as much a structural outcome of action as a vehicle for it, and that leadership is but one of a number of structuring reactions to flows of environmental stimuli' (P, 445).	Researchers need to pay attention to: • The dynamic nature of DL processes in co-production teams, the factors which affect it • The designed and emergent aspects of DL and how they could help or hinder co-production processes and outcomes
2. Maak, T., Pless, N.M. (2006), Responsible leadership in a stakeholder society: A relational perspective, *Journal of Business Ethics,* 66, 99-115.	• Examines 'the concept of *responsible leadership* in the context of stakeholder theory' (p, 112) • Followers often have equal status but are affected by and affect leader's actions • Challenges facing leaders: 'dealing with different value sets, mindsets, interaction styles to coping with conflicts of interests and reconciling ethical dilemmas' (p, 103)	• The limitations of this debate (leadership as an individual act and ethics as good and pre-established) alerts researchers to the issue of *ethics* (and whether it is/could be associated to power) but not as a 'given and *unproblematic*' issue but as *negotiated* and *problematic.*
Complexity sciences		
1. (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009)- complex adaptive systems (CAS)	• Leadership as a 'collective social process emerging through the interactions of multiple actors'	• Paying attention to embedded nature of practice and unpredictability of outcomes of local interactions • Leadership is dynamic, distrubted and contextual (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009: 631)
2. Stacey (2001, 2007)- complex responsive processes of relating (CRP)	• A better understanding of emergence and the unpredictability of the outcome of local interactions • Paradoxical nature of power dynamics	• Sensitising researchers to unpredictability of interactions between groups involved in co-production of public services • Power as both an enabler and a constraint; relational nature of power results in inclusions and exclusions

4. Exploring Leadership in the co-production process

In this section we develop a conceptual framework to explore how the processes of decision-making about, and plans for implementations of, public services emerge in co-production situations. We argue that 'co-production processes' require a conceptualization which would allow researchers to capture the complexities of co-production teams in which groups of diverse individuals come together in order to decide 'how best' to deliver a particular service. More specifically, we are concerned with the structure, the nature of leadership and power relations in co-production.

Our framework adopts a critical relational social constructionism approach (Hosking 2007), which lends itself to the examination of dynamic and emergent co-production processes. It also creates a congruent base for the inclusion of from the management and organisation studies literature. These insights include aspects of distributed leadership (Bolden 2011; Gronn "002; Jackson and Parry 2011; Lawler 2007; Mehra et al. 2006; Spillane 2006) as being inherent in groups such as co-production teams, the concept of interactional expertise, to explain how people from different disciplinary/professional backgrounds develop shared understanding(Collins 2004, 2007, 2010, 2011) and a sub-set of complexity sciences that examines the responsive and relational aspects of interactions in social groupings (Stacey 2001, 2007).

Our conceptual framework is based primarily on empirical studies because we are mindful of some scholars' concerns that high level of abstraction could restrict empirical application of a framework (Barley and Tolbert 1997; Giddens 1976). Some of the studies that we draw on have been developed for organizations in private sector. Therefore, in addition to avoiding excessive abstraction, we point out the context of these studies, and where appropriate, highlight or raise questions about the extent to which they could apply to the public or third sectors.

Critical relational constructionism

Social constructionism has been discussed in numerous ways embracing many strands, themes, and foci (Danziger 1997). However, they share the assumption that reality is socially created in interactions among people (Van der Haar and Hosking 2004). The relational aspect of this approach, according to Van de Haar and Hosking (2004: 1019-21), 'focuses on construction processes', which broadly include:

> "..co-ordinations, interactions, or text-context relations. More narrowly, when acts (texts) are brought into relation they construct relational processes. This means that constructing: (i) becomes understood as co-constructing, rather than an individual

affair; and (ii) social construction becomes talk of relational processes and realities rather than meanings, so to speak, "inside someone's head'." (ibid: 1021, *emphasis in original*).

In this approach, relational realities are "multiple, local-historical, constructions made in language *and other forms of actions*" (ibid: 1020, *emphasis in original*). Power is also perceived as a contested, perpetual relational process, which paradoxically enables and constrains simultaneously similar to positions taken by others although (Hosking, 2007). It would seem, therefore, that the critical relational constructionism perspective allows researchers to examine how shared understanding, power relations, consensus and contentions about decisions and plans emerge in co-production situations. This approach also offers a congruent base for concepts concerned with leadership and power which are central to the proposed framework for the study of the co-production process proposed here.

Concepts of power and structure in the distributed leadership discourse

Insights from extant research can shed light on what happens when teams consisting of individuals from diverse backgrounds and agendas develop shared understanding, and how power relations and leadership emerge in their interactions. We start by drawing on some debates in *distributed leadership* literature as they are pertinent to our conceptualization of the co-production process.

Terms such as collective, dispersed and distributed leadership are used interchangeably or with some minor variations in much of the leadership literature (Jackson and Parry 2011). However, there is a general agreement that leadership and followership do not reside in different individuals, but move between people like 'information' and 'power' at different levels of organisations or societies (ibid: 102). For example, Gronn (2002, p. 446-447) describes distributed leadership as arising from 'spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, and institutionalized practices'. It is worth noting that the 'institutionalized practices' that Gronn refers to may have developed spontaneously or to were planned some degree through managerial interventions, but they are usually a mixture of both. Similarly, Spillane (2006) regards distributed leadership as a shared and emergent process, 'dynamically constructed and shaped over time through the interaction of leaders, followers, and the situation'. Contemporary debates in public management acknowledge to complexity associated with attempts to develop a model of leadership appropriate in public sector contexts (Bolden 2011; Brookes and Grint 2010; Thorpe et al. 2011; Van Wart 2003) but there appears to be little in terms of exploring distributed leadership specifically in co-production situations.

An aspect of distributed leadership which is often taken for granted, hence rather underexplored, is how individuals communicate with each other and develop shared understandings. Collins' (2004, 2007, 2010, 2011) extensive work on different types of expertise illuminates this area. He argues that experts learn from two different types of experiences: their own domain (*contributory expertise*) and by communication with others from different domains (*interactional expertise*) (Collins, 2004). Interactional expertise, which emerges through linguistic socialization (Collins, 2007) in fact exists everywhere as individuals have to understand different groups of people (Collins, 2011). *Interactional expertise* goes beyond a *common knowledge* (Grant 1996) and elucidates how individuals can develop an 'expertise' in communicating effectively with others. Therefore, it is plausible to argue that how interactional expertise is developed among the co-production team members may influence the processes and outcomes.

Linking ideas around distributed leadership to the concept of co-production highlights the importance of power dynamics and team structures. The issue of power and influence which 'enable and constrain' leadership dynamics in social groupings (Bolden 2011, p.260-261) are discussed next.

Relational Power

We argued earlier that the critical aspect of relational constructionism relates to 'power' being theorized as relational and paradoxical in that it is both enabling and constraining at the same time (Hosking 2007; Van der Haar and Hosking 2004). Power is 'axiomatic of leadership' and an inseparable part of leadership processes (Jackson and Parry 2011, p.96) and becomes evident when it is exercised (Foucault 1977). The leadership literature pays some attention to the notion of power (Gordon 2002; Lawler 2007) but it still requires further examination, especially at group level (Gronn 2009) and in contexts of cross-sectoral collaborations (Seitanidi 2010). Research in education shows that distributed leadership does not necessarily lead to distributed power (Hatcher 2005), which means that distributed leadership may not be democratic. From a complexity sciences perspective, the relational and paradoxical nature of power could also result in inclusions/exclusions of individuals or groups (Stacey, 2001, 2007), which in turn may support or block the co-production process. Future research needs to explore the gap between 'distributed leadership' and 'distributed power' in co-production processes and the extent to which it could affect the process and outcome of co-production.

Team Structures

While concepts of command, authority and accountability define the structure of organisations and work teams, leadership is what takes place between people (Jackson & Parry, 2011). Organizations are usually 'purposive, structured and often highly politicized' where individuals discuss their decisions and intentions (Hendry 2000, p.967). However, research shows that emergent structures, such as those established by citizens who come together to accomplish a particular task, are more effective than the ones imposed from above (Barker 1993). Put differently, understanding leadership as a process recognizes 'that organization is as much a structural outcome of action as a vehicle for it' (Gronn 2002, p.445).

The challenge of co-production, in our view, is to create a 'space' where groups of diverse individuals, who are often accustomed to working in different cultural and structural domains and pursuing different political interests, come together to make decisions about the provision and delivery of public services and in the process of negotiating and attempts at reaching consensus provide a service together. Where and how that space is 'defined' may vary depending on context.

5. Implications for further research

This paper makes a number of contributions to the thematic focus of this workshop, including reviewing how concepts of leadership, power or structure are currently applied in the co-production literature, and developing a theoretical approach which would help us to better understand co-production.

This conceptualization has some implications for theory and practice of co-production. In terms of theoretical development we can expect to develop concepts around the 'blurring' of organizational and sectoral boundaries. Is there the possibility of a space outside such organisations where co-production becomes what the theory suggest, a mutually shared process which demonstrates that both parties benefit? With regard to power relations between citizens and governmental agencies, our approach might support the development of answers to questions about the extent to which leadership in service design and delivery can be shared between public officials and citizens, and how power is negotiated and shared in a co-production relationship?

As for its practical implications, this initial conceptual framework offers a new perspective of thinking about co-production as an emergent and ongoing negotiated process. Moreover, by focusing on issues of leadership and organisational structure we could improve our

understanding of differences between regular production and co-production with regard to organisational context and leadership, which in turn can be expected to lead to the identification of challenges that are encountered in developing or taking part in co-production activities. This initial conceptual framework also promises to shed light on how co-production teams develop interactional expertise and what factors and contexts could facilitate its development. A study based on such a conceptual perspective can also be expected to create detailed insights about leadership approaches and institutional structures which best facilitate the co-production of welfare services.

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