

4 Co-Production at the Crossroads of Public Administration Regimes

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Background

In the immediate post-WW II period citizens faced a rapidly expanding, yet basically traditional public administration, with its hierarchical chain of command, where they were primarily viewed as passive clients or beneficiaries of public services. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, with the spread of New Public Management (NPM), they were expected to become consumers and exercise more choice between various providers of public financed services, either public, private, for-profit or nonprofit. Here the market replaced the state as the main mechanism for governing the expression of citizens' preferences. More recently, we find the spread of network society (Hartley, 2005) or New Public Governance (NPG) (Osborne, 2006, 2010). NPG implies a more plural and pluralist model of provision and governance of welfare services. It is based on public-private networks, where citizens are expected to play an active role as co-producers of some aspects of the services they demand and have come to depend upon in their daily life. A fourth alternative public administration regime (PAR) now appears on the horizon, called a Communitarian regime, for lack of a better term. We need, therefore, to inquire how changes in the public sector and differences between public administration regimes are reflected in their perspective on the role of service users and professional service providers.

Citizens and professionals are the two main actors in the classical definition of co-production by Ostrom and her colleagues in the early 1970s (Parks, et al., 1981, 1999; Ostrom, 1996). Yet, today co-production appears to be at the crossroads between different public administration regimes, each with a different focus on when, where, why and how citizens can and should participate in the design and delivery of public services. In particular, they have different ideas about the role of users and professionals in promoting service quality. Thus, co-production may mean something quite different in different public administration regimes, while scholars' perspective on and definition of co-production depend to a large extent on the context in which they study the phenomenon.

Four Public Administration Regimes

This section introduces the concept of public administration regimes and briefly presents four of them; i.e., traditional public administration, NPM, NPG and a Communitarian regime. Changes in public administration regimes can set limits for citizen participation and co-production of public services. Therefore, it is important to compare PARs and understand how they differ in terms of their values and focus.

Figure 4.1 briefly summarizes some of the main points about different public administration regimes, but does not attempt to cover all aspects, which would take us far beyond the scope and purpose of this chapter. Here we will briefly consider the theoretical roots, value base and some key concepts of each administrative regime. Taken together these elements comprise crucial aspects of different PARs, similar to the idea of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and production regimes (Kitschelt et al., 1999). In particular, PARs attribute quite different weight to the role of citizens and professionals in public service delivery, and their perspective differs sharply on how to guarantee service quality (Vamstad, 2012).

From a historical perspective, we will begin with traditional public administration, as seen during most of the 20th Century; followed by NPM, starting in the 1980s; and more recently the newly emerging paradigm of NPG at the turn of the century, based on ideas of network governance. We conclude this brief overview with a potential new regime found in ideas of spontaneous community and voluntarism. While these four regimes differ in some important aspects, they also share some common features. Although each public administration regime may be linked to a particular ideology or historical

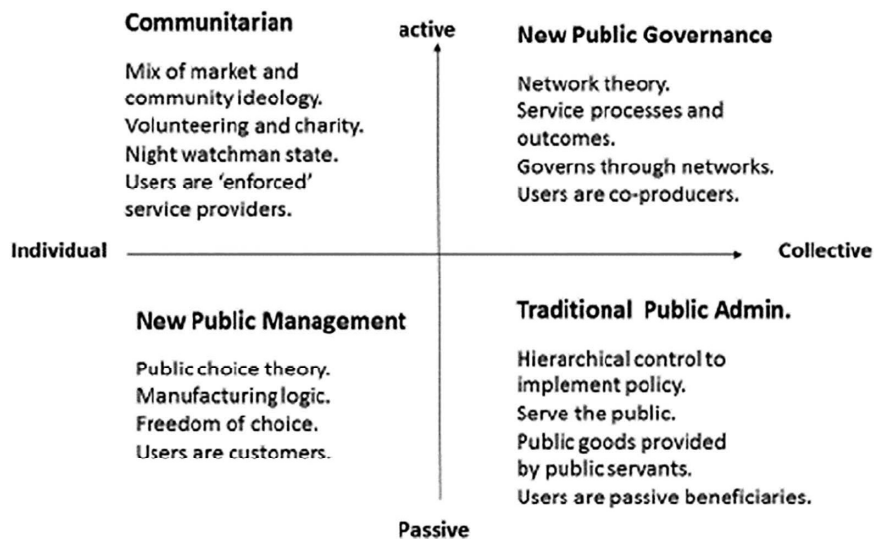


Figure 4.1 Public Administration Regimes: Citizen Participation and Responsibility

period, they can also be conceived as ‘layered realities’ that coexist with each other (Hartley, 2005; Osborne, 2010). Thus, more than one regime may be found in any given society at any given time, operating in different service sectors. One public administration regime may dominate in one public service sector, while another may do so in another. Moreover, they can shift over time, through the spread and ascent of a new public administration regime.

Two variables are employed herein to analyse the relations between and among public administration regimes: a) the degree of citizen activity in providing a public service and b) the institutional arrangement or degree of public responsibility for providing basic public services. The first variable is rather straightforward and ranges from low to high. The second is more complex, but reflects the degree of public vs. private responsibility for providing services to citizens. Health care or childcare can illustrate this. Is it a universal service provided to everyone in a given territory, or is it mainly dependent on individual initiative, where access to service often depends on controlling various private assets? In the former case there is a collective responsibility for providing a service, with certain limits or restrictions based on eligibility, while the responsibility is primarily individual in the latter case. This variable ranges from individual to collective. Figure 4.1 depicts these four PARs in terms of these two analytical dimensions.

Both a Communitarian regime and NPG require a high degree of citizen participation in the provision of social services, but they are found at opposite ends of a continuum ranging from individual to collective service provision. Similarly, neither traditional public administration nor NPM provide much room for citizens to participate actively in service design and delivery, and they also reflect different degrees of individual and collective responsibility for the provision of public services.

Traditional Public Administration

Traditional public administration has its theoretical roots in sociology, political science and public policy. It is based on a hierarchical model of command and control, stemming from ideas of Max Weber, with clear lines of vertical authority and responsibility. His ideas were later developed and expanded by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson (Ostrom and Ostrom, 1971). The value base of traditional public administration is found in public sector ethos or serving the public and its key concept is public goods that are provided by public or civil servants, who place a heavy emphasis on professional policy implementation and bureaucratic norms of equal treatment of all citizens.

New Public Management (NPM)

Its theoretical roots were found in growing criticism in the 1980s of the inefficiencies of traditional public administration, that were articulated in ‘public choice’ theory and management studies. It promoted ideas of the marketization and commercialization of public services in order to rectify these shortcomings

and improve the efficiency and productivity of public sector services. Managerialism also plays a big role in this PAR. Its value base stems from industry and it promotes a manufacturing logic that emphasizes service inputs and outputs, rather than a service logic that focuses on outcomes (Osborne et al., 2013). Its key concepts are ‘freedom of choice’ for consumers and competition between various providers in order to promote service quality.

New Public Governance (NPG)

The theoretical roots of NPG stem from sociology and network theory and its value base is considered ‘participatory democracy’ by some (Pestoff, 2009) and ‘neo-corporatist’ by others (Osborne, 2010). NPG is based on a service logic of production that focuses on service processes and outcomes, where public value is a key concept. It governs through networks and partnerships, where the third sector and social enterprises can play an important role and citizens are active co-producers of public services.

Communitarian Regime

The following is an early approximation at best, although more clues are gleaned from Brudney and England (1983), Horne and Shirley (2009) and Bovaird and Löffler (2012). Several examples help illustrate a Communitarian type regime, although some may appear dated now. Nevertheless they provide historical examples of the development of Communitarian regimes. The Coalition Government in Great Britain after 2010 introduced a program called Big Society to promote community empowerment by reorganizing public services and facilitating social action (Sloccock, 2015; Hudson, 2011). Its value base came from volunteering, philanthropy and charity, accompanied by massive budget cuts for public services, while encouraging families, communities and the third sector to fill the vacuum. Similar policies have surfaced elsewhere; in Japan, under the guise of ‘Integrated Community Care’ (Agenosono, 2014; Tsutsui, 2013; Tabata, 2014), NGOization in Thailand (Ungsuchaval, 2016) and in Europe, including Denmark (cf. Politiken) and the Netherlands (cf. Nederhand and Van Meerkerk 2017), under the label of ‘co-production and/or co-creation’. These diverse policy expressions are gathered herein under the heading of a ‘Communitarian type of regime’. Government retains responsibility for design of service delivery, while citizens become ‘enforced’ co-producers (Fotaki, 2011), since they are now primarily responsible for implementing public services.

The Role of the Principal Actors in Determining Service Quality

Citizen/users and the professional staff are the two principal actors in classical definitions of co-production. We will, therefore, continue by briefly

contrasting the role of each of them in the four public administration regimes.

The Role of Citizens and Users in Service Quality

The role of users in the provision of public financed services is central to this analysis. Following Figure 4.1, we can envision the role of users of public services either as beneficiaries, consumers, active co-producers or service providers, as depicted in Figure 4.2 below. It also indicates some important attributes of these different roles. They are related to the most important dimensions of our analysis, the level of activity by service users and the degree of individual or collective action necessary to avail themselves of such services.

Traditional public administration tends to be perceived as paternalistic by many since it is achieved through the ‘professional gift’ model of service provision. Here citizens are considered the beneficiaries of public services, but clearly with a passive role as recipients of services, without any meaningful exit or voice options available to them. Their only recourse or influence is found in the electoral system that at best can provide indirect, intermittent representation of their interest, depending on the outcome of an election.

NPM often attempts to achieve its goals by using a ‘carrot and stick’ approach to incentives, both for providers and users of services, which can either discourage or reward different kinds of behaviour. Here citizens are considered customers with some limited choice, but little voice and no

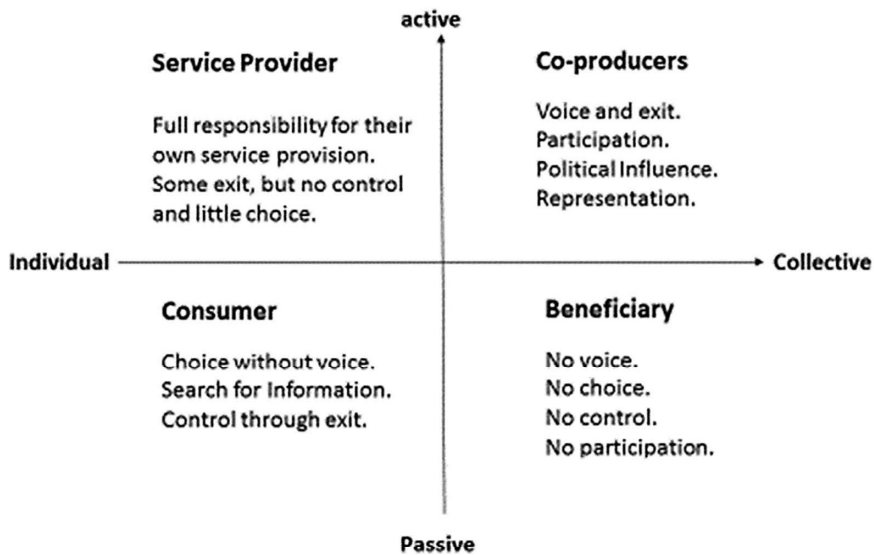


Figure 4.2 The Role of Citizens as Users of Public Services

representation. They can choose between pre-existing packages or ‘offers’, but they have little influence on the content or its features. Service quality is guaranteed through competition, where consumer choice determines the best quality.

NPG is based on ideas of establishing a partnership between citizens and the government, where citizens are considered co-producers of public services. This not only gives them both choice and voice in service provision, but in some cases, even representation that allows them greater direct influence than either traditional public administration or *NPM*. Here service quality is determined primarily by user participation, which allows service users to observe service delivery on a weekly or daily basis. This, in turn, promotes a dialog and mutual exchange between the professional providers and service users, among other things about service quality (Vidal, 2013).

In a *Communitarian regime* the role of service users is to provide many public services by and for themselves, with little or no public support, sometimes alongside, but often instead of the professionals. Here users and/or their loved-ones and neighbours become service providers, while professionals are transformed into ‘back-up’ agents who only intervene when the service provided proves insufficient. Determination of service quality becomes more patch-work, since access depends on the availability, willingness and capacity of service providers, which can vary considerably.

The Role of Professionals and Service Quality

The role of professionals in guaranteeing service quality is contrasted in Figure 4.3 below.

Traditional public administration relies heavily, if not exclusively, on training and professionalism to guarantee service quality (Vamstad, 2012). In a hierarchical command and control system, professionals guarantee service quality through their training. Thus, they alone can decide and prescribe appropriate measures, based on their professional knowledge, experience and insights. Collaboration, negotiations and competition are not normally taken into account in professional decisions.

NPM, by contrast, places heavy emphasis on competition and consumer choice, leaving it to the market to provide a guarantee of service quality, rather than the activities or training of professional service providers or negotiations. *NPM* assumes that better quality providers will attract more customers than inferior products or services. Professionals, regardless of whether public, private or non-profit, will, therefore, focus strongly on competition. Thus, it emphasizes quite different competencies and promotes a mind-set that is based on competition between providers, rather than command and control or collaboration.

NPG emphasizes collaboration and negotiation between partners, regardless of whether public, private or non-profit. Given this focus, user

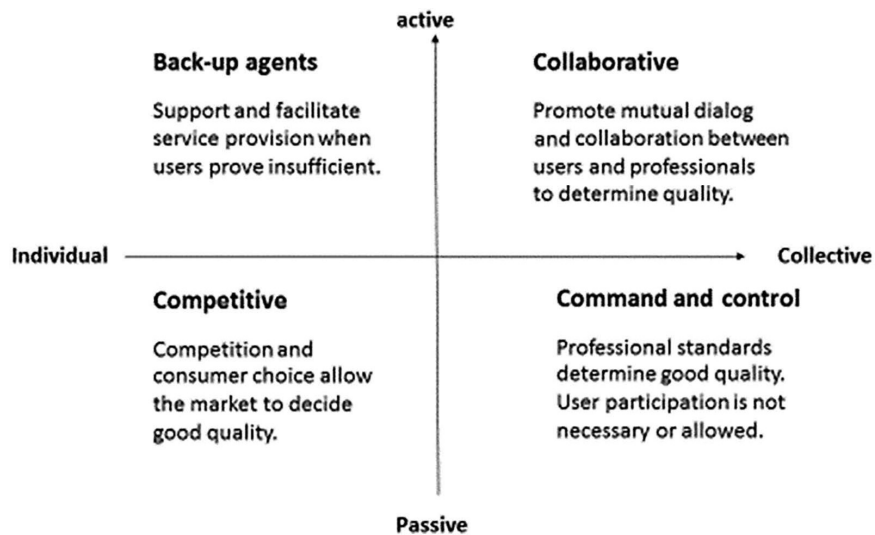


Figure 4.3 The Role of Professionals in Guaranteeing Service Quality

participation and mutual dialog between service users and the staff replaces professionalism or competition as the main guarantee of service quality (Vidal, 2013).

Finally, the perspective of a *Communitarian regime* remains largely undeveloped in this respect, but professionals can complement service provision by steering users to available resources in the community or to voluntary organizations. However, the consequence of this for service quality or availability for different groups of users remains to be seen.

Summary and Conclusions

The role of service users and professional service providers shows very clear contrasts in different PARs, especially in determining service quality. This analysis demonstrates that co-production appears very much at the crossroads today, with starkly different roles for its key actors, the users and professionals, and thus, it has a potential for developing in quite different directions. It will, therefore, take different meanings in different public administrative regimes. The role attributed to it will, however, depend in part on the level of activity ascribed to users and in part to the degree of individual or collective action necessary for providing the service. However, each direction not only implies different values, but also different roles for professionals and users/citizen participation. The way in which

co-production develops depends, therefore, on the interplay of forces at the micro and macro levels of society that favour the development of a particular PAR rather than another.

Historically, co-production doesn't appear to be a highly relevant concept for either traditional public administration or NPM, since both rely mainly on passive clients/customers, although both may occasionally pay lip service to active clients for strategic considerations. By contrast, a Communitarian type of regime and NPG promote active users to a much greater extent, encouraging them to provide certain aspects of their own services, with or without public support and/or financing. In an NPG type of PAR, promotion of co-production will go hand in hand with a greater emphasis on citizens, democratic participation and the revitalization of democracy (Pestoff, 2009). In a communitarian type of PAR, by contrast, efficiency and cut-back in public spending will provide the main motive for promoting greater community and volunteer responsibility for service provision. It is natural, therefore, to expect that co-production will develop both in an individual or collective fashion and that it will involve more or less citizen participation, depending on the public administration regime. However, the mix of these two variables will be regime specific and service specific.

Thus, co-production is currently at the crossroads of major economic, social and political developments. The public debate is particularly lively in terms of the future of the public sector and the delivery of public services, as seen in several European and Asian countries. So co-production will probably develop along different trajectories under different circumstances. If governments want to enlist more user/citizen participation in public service provision, it is important to recognize the variation in the roles associated with different public administration regimes and to calibrate policy expectations of user and professional behaviour. Careful calibration of policy expectations will help avoid unrealistic or unattainable goals in public policy and will, therefore, result in greater goal achievement. By contrast, less consideration of the fundamental differences in user and professional behaviour in different public administration regimes will often result in failure to enlist sufficient user/citizen participation. Thus, having the right policy tool for the appropriate public administration regime will prove essential for achieving basic policy goals and promoting user/citizen participation in public service design and delivery.

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