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3.1 THE INTRODUCTION OF CO-CREATION IN A HOSTILE PUBLIC SECTOR ENVIRONMENT

Co-creation is currently receiving growing attention and seems to be exerting a real impact on the public sector (Brandsen et al. 2018). The problem is, however, that even the most motivated and well-managed forms of co-creation may run into problems because they introduce a new governance logic that clashes with the existing governance logics. This chapter tracks the genesis of the somewhat hostile public sector environment into which co-creation is introduced. It explains the form and functioning of Weberian-style public bureaucracy and its contingent incorporation of professional rule, and it scrutinizes the New Public Management (NPM) reform movement that both supplanted and supplemented the bureaucratic governance model. To contextualize the emergence of co-creation, it also accounts for the basic elements in New Public Governance (NPG) that aim to solve the problems inherent to NPM (and to some extent also Old Public Administration (OPA)). The institutional history leading to the co-existence of competing public governance paradigms will be followed by examples of the clashes between co-creation and the existing governance paradigms and a further explanation of the arising conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes that call for the development of coping strategies enabling the actors in and around the public sector to reap the fruits of co-creation.

3.2 OLD PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE AGE OF BUREAUCRACY

The OPA paradigm combines bureaucracy with liberal representative democracy (Farazmand 2010). The goal of public bureaucracy is to produce stable and predictable administration in accordance with the political preferences of

elected government. The politicians are expected to make authoritative political decisions based on public debate, interparty negotiations and majority voting within formal political institutions and based on constitutional law. Political decisions made by elected politicians result in laws, regulations and instructions that define the overall political goals. While these political decisions may be based on a combination of personal values, interest representation and party ideology, the civil servants populating the public bureaucracy are expected to make impartial and purely rational decisions when selecting the means that most effectively and efficiently achieve the politically determined goal. The rational decisions made at the apex of public bureaucracy result in the formulation of written rules and formal procedures that must be observed when making administrative decisions on the frontlines, where public authority is exercised, services are delivered, and society and the economy are regulated (Sager & Rosser 2021). The centralized control in public hierarchies thus places a premium on administrative compliance.

The centralized control along the vertical axis of public bureaucracy is combined with a fine-grained division of labour along the horizontal axis. Hence, the public sector is divided into numerous departments, sections, offices and teams, each entrusted with solving a particular task or administrating a particular set of laws. While the centralized authority structure enables executive leaders to set a new course for public organizations and secure compliance, the high degree of bureaucratic specialization tends to enhance efficiency by ensuring that public tasks are carried out by a dedicated, well-trained staff that is allowed to focus on a few tasks and do them well, avoiding a 'jack of all trades and master of none' situation. Hence, while centralized hierarchy ensures control, the horizontal division of labour creates a considerable specialization gain.

Today, we often use the term 'bureaucratic' in a negative and derogatory manner. From once being a normative ideal, it now refers to something that is overly formalistic, rigid and convoluted. 'Bureaucracy bashing' has become a national sport in many countries, and bureaucracy is scorned by left-wing and right-wing commentators alike. However, we must never forget how the initial introduction of bureaucratic administration was a huge step forward compared to what existed previously. It brought an end to the pre-bureaucratic age of governance and its unfortunate hodgepodge of politics and administration, random and uninformed governance decisions, governmental inefficiency and the widespread corruption and abuse of office resulting from unclear and informal rules, excessive room for discretion and the lack of a professional ethos (see Olsen 2006). The rise of bureaucracy was intrinsically linked to public sector expansion, which came in response to social and political demands for a protective welfare state. Public bureaucracy helps to structure the work undertaken by large-scale organizations and to coordinate systematically the

actions of a large number of people working at different levels to achieve a common goal. As such, modern bureaucracy was a child of the Industrial Revolution; it focused on economies of scale and the delivery of standardized service solutions to the masses.

In some countries, public bureaucracy has been complemented by professional rule (Torfing et al. 2020), which grants particular groups of professionally trained employees (e.g. schoolteachers, doctors, nurses, social caseworkers) widespread autonomy to make discretionary decisions within the centrally defined rules and procedures. Professional autonomy was dispensed as a part of a tacit agreement that the professionally trained employees would use their skills and capabilities to deliver high-quality welfare solutions and would discipline colleagues who failed to live up to the norms of the profession. Professional rule chimes with the Weberian conception of civil servants as recruited based on their professional merits and driven by public interests. However, it introduces a tension in public bureaucracy between the centralized control by executive managers and the local autonomy of public professionals.

3.3   THE CRITIQUE OF BUREAUCRACY AND THE RISE OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

From the late 1970s onward, the bureaucratic governance paradigm was subjected to heavy criticism from public choice theorists, right-wing commentators and neo-conservative and neoliberal politicians. Downs (1967) criticized the constantly growing public bureaucracies for being overly rigid in their structure and functioning, which rendered them incapable of innovating and delivering on their goals. Niskanen (1971) claimed that the public sector is populated with self-serving public employees who are primarily interested in increasing their budgets. Le Grand (2003) and others before him criticized frontline staff for being insensitive to the shifting and individual demands of the citizenry, while Osborne and Gaebler (1993) argued that the lack of competition and directive leadership made it impossible for public bureaucracies to deliver high-quality, low-cost services. This tsunami of criticism prompted the emergence of the NPM reform movement, which sought to combine an increasing reliance on market-based governance with the introduction of performance management backed by the use of incentives by transactional leaders (Hood 1991).

NPM aimed to replace hierarchical forms of government with market-based governance. Hence, there was a strong focus on the deregulation, privatization, outsourcing and commercialization of the remaining public sector. Public services were increasingly contracted out to private service providers who were competing for contracts and customers. Competition was seen as a tool for simultaneously improving service quality while cutting costs. Allowing

citizens to choose freely between service providers reflected the belief that they should have more choice and be able to vote with their feet to punish the service providers delivering poor quality.

To prevent opportunistic behaviour, both private and public service providers should be subjected to a strict performance management regime based on clear goals, measurement of key performance indicators, regular reporting and the use of conditional rewards and penalties (Barber 2008; Lane 2006). The introduction of performance management reflected the new priority of the production of results over ensuring rule compliance. Indeed, public managers and local institutions should have greater leeway to exploit their resources flexibly to deliver results. This was obtained by combining deregulation and the delegation of administrative responsibilities. Public managers should be professionally trained to lead and manage the centrally defined framework of budget frame and performance goals. Not only should we let managers manage, but we should also make them manage by introducing performance-related pay and short-term contracts (Normann 2001).

NPM was highly successful in terms of transforming the public sector in most parts of the world, although some north-western European countries have been reluctant to buy the full package and have only selectively implemented certain elements (Klausen & Ståhlberg 1998; Pollitt & Bouckaert 2004). However, it soon became clear that the economic gains from the continued outsourcing of public service production were declining (Vrangbæk et al. 2015) and that control-based performance management produced a series of unintended negative effects, such as gaming, goal displacement and the crowding out of public service motivation and intrinsic task motivation (Bouckaert & Halligan 2006; Boyne 2010; Jacobsen et al. 2014). Scholars even showed how, after 30 years of NPM in the UK, public services had become more costly and that the quality had suffered (Hood & Dixon 2015). Moreover, the combination of the outsourcing of public services to private contractors and the creation of special purpose agencies, each equipped with their own budget frame and a set of performance targets, led to the increasing fragmentation of public governance and frequent failures to coordinate across relevant and affected actors. Finally, there were mounting criticisms of the failure of NPM to deal with the repercussions of the financial crisis and to solve the numerous complex problems confronting modern societies (Roberts 2001; Vries & Nemec 2013). Competition and performance management presuppose the existence of a clearly defined set of standard services that can be contracted out and delivered in ways that allow the documentation of outputs and outcomes. However, there is an increasing demand for innovative solutions.

3.4   NEW PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

While NPM reformed public bureaucracy in most countries (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2004), its shortcomings and mounting criticisms slowly but steadily paved the way for the development of alternative forms of governance, which were initially tentative and provisional but have gradually gained momentum, especially at the local government level. Hence, bureaucracy and market governance are supplemented by multi-actor collaboration in networks and partnerships (Klijn & Koppenjan 2015), and performance management is challenged by the introduction of a more trust-based management (Bentzen 2022). Some scholars have referred to these new and emerging forms of governance as post-NPM, whereas others have talked about the rise of NPG (Osborne 2006, 2010; Triantafillou & Torfing 2013). Let us examine the key components of NPG more closely.

Interactive governance in networks and partnerships counteract the growing fragmentation of the public sector and the functional differentiation of society and the economy (Klijn & Koppenjan 2015; Sørensen & Torfing 2007). The inclusion of different public, private and civic actors in governance networks may potentially enhance efficiency and effectiveness by mobilizing particular, specialized forms of knowledge and creating joint ownership of new solutions. At the same time, it strengthens democracy by expanding participation beyond the ballot box and creating arenas for the joint deliberation of policy and regulation. The formation of formal partnerships based on trust and risk-sharing also allow public and private actors to use each other's resources and abilities to design, build and operate large-scale infrastructures (Koppenjan 2005, 2015). Partnerships may also create conditions for spurring public innovation by stimulating mutual learning and developing joint ownership of new and bold solutions (Brogaard 2021).

The unintended negative consequences of performance management based on high-powered incentives to deliver on a particular set of targets has stimulated the introduction of more trust-based management. This shift is informed by the critique of the principal–agent model and its recommendation of the control-fixated management of self-serving public employees. The new stewardship theory (Schillemans 2013) assumes a considerable overlap between the goals, aspirations and motivations found at the top and bottom of public organizations and therefore recommends that managers: (a) engage in a trust-based, learning-focused dialogue with their employees about visions, goals and tools in public service production; (b) empower them to engage in bounded self-regulation and invite them to exercise team-related leadership; and (c) involve them in making strategic leadership decisions on behalf of the entire organization (Torfing & Bentzen 2020). This type of management is

likely to stimulate the public service motivation and intrinsic job motivation of public employees as an antidote to the NPM creation of a 'workforce of cynics' who only work to win rewards or avoid punishment (Moynihan 2010).

At the service-production level, co-production is viewed as a solution for cash-strapped public service organizations, and co-creation is viewed as a strategy for spurring complex problem solving based on collaborative innovation (Torfing 2016). While elements of co-production and co-creation have always existed in the public sector, there is a new understanding of the need for resource mobilization in the face of the cross-pressure between growing expectations and the scarcity of public resources. The collaborative turn and celebration of trust implicit to NPG also support the expansion of co-production and co-creation that aspires to change the state–citizen relation by making it more interactive. Citizens should therefore no longer be seen merely as 'voters' or 'clients' (as in OPA) or as 'customers' operating in quasi-markets (NPM), but rather as resourceful partners of public service institutions and active participants in deliberative processes aiming to enhance public value creation.

At first, the growing embrace of co-creation was motivated by the need to reinvigorate the public sector by means of expanding current forms of collaborative governance to include lay actors and to respond to the growing demands for active and direct participation from the increasing number of critical, competent and assertive citizens (Dalton & Welzel 2014). As experience with co-creation has increased, however, it has become clear that co-creation provides a welcome supplement to both the traditional linear way of governing down the chain of government and the idea of a market-driven public sector in which actors compete with each other instead of collaborating. The hierarchical mode of governance fails to exploit the knowledge, ideas and capabilities of the downstream actors, and the competitive governance model prevents a fruitful exchange between relevant and affected actors within a particular field. By contrast, co-creation involves actors from multiple sectors and levels in sustained efforts to exchange and pool resources in order to solve pressing problems.

While NPG and co-creation is often thought of as an alternative to OPA and NPM, there are also examples of synergies. In some places, the expansion of co-creation has been supported by bureaucratic forms of top-down leadership that has prompted public organizations and their staff to adopt a new mindset and develop a new modus operandi involving stakeholders and lay actors in fostering new and better governance solutions. Here, what is important is that the executive leadership is ready to surrender their top-down control over what is going on further down in their organization. Public leaders find it extremely difficult to surrender their political and administrative control but doing so may help them to become metagovernors who aim to influence processes

and outcomes by means of designing and framing arenas for co-creation and facilitating collaborative interaction instead of insisting on having the final word and determining the content of public decisions singlehandedly. Metagovernance, defined as the attempt to influence collaborative solutions without reverting to hierarchical command and control (Sørensen & Torfing 2009), allows public leaders to slacken the reins and benefit from the collective wisdom of relevant and affected actors engaged in collaboration without losing their ability to shape the goals and set the course of public governance.

There may also be a potential synergy between co-creation and NPM. The growing focus on goals and results and the strengthening of the leadership capabilities of local managers resulting from years of NPM reforms may support local experimentation with co-creation, as local managers may want to test whether it is possible to achieve the goals of their organization though the active involvement of relevant and affected actors. In contrast to OPA, NMP had a keen eye for the contribution of private businesses to public governance, and the transactional contracts with private service providers have gradually yielded to more relational contracts based on sustained negotiation. Expanding the range of actors to include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, citizens and users could be the next step.

Additional synergies between co-creation and the pre-existing modes of public governance may be discovered but seem to be outnumbered by the tensions and potential clashes. The next section explores these tensions further.

3.5   THE CLASH BETWEEN CO-CREATION AND THE ESTABLISHED MODES OF GOVERNANCE

There is no way of hiding the fact that co-creation is likely to clash with the traditional forms of democratic and bureaucratic government. The expansion of co-creation will collide with liberal democratic ideas about the sovereign political leadership of elected leaders, which leave no room for power sharing with societal actors. Co-creation will clash with the hierarchical authority structure of public bureaucracy, as it aspires to link relevant and affected actors in horizontal networks in which they collaborate on equal footing. Co-creation will also clash with the bureaucratic compartmentalization of the administration into specialized agencies and silos, because it aims to cut across organizational boundaries and bring together different forms of expertise. Co-creation will strongly object to the idea that well-educated and well-trained professionals are the experts on all aspects of public service production and public problem solving, and it will insist that much needed expertise is found outside the public sector; for example, in different forms of lay-actor experiences, stories, ideas and assessments. Finally, co-creation will go against the conception of citizens as passive recipients of public services and targets of

public interventions, recasting them as active contributors to the development of innovative public value outcomes.

Likewise, co-creation is destined to clash with the ideas and practices inherent to NPM. NPM has a clear tendency to reduce elected politicians to distant boards of directors that merely oversee goal achievement, which goes against the idea in co-creation that politicians participate in interactive policy-making processes that spur learning and innovation. NPM also views public and private actors as being in a competitive relationship, whereas co-creation aims to foster collaboration to exploit resource interdependencies. Moreover, the idea that economic incentives offer the most important way of motivating governance actors clashes with the idea in co-creation that public and private actors collaborate because they want to solve pressing problems and create public value. Performance management is fundamental to the attempt made by NPM to boost efficiency, but it tends to stifle creativity by forcing actors to deliver on predetermined targets. Finally, the strong commitment of NPM to learn service production tends to remove the slack resources that are a precondition for the initiation of co-creation processes.

Co-creation emerges in a public sector environment that in some ways tends to obstruct and hamper its expansion and functioning. This is not easily eradicated. The path-dependency literature (Pierson 2000) reveals how there are often short-term benefits to be gained from sticking to the old, well-established forms of public governance rather than investing in new, uncertain, challenging and costly ones. Even if steadfast strategic management efforts are successful in prompting the introduction of co-creation in public service organizations (Ferlie & Ongaro 2015; Ongaro et al. 2021), key aspects of co-creation may still collide with key aspects of the established forms of public governance, giving rise to what we shall refer to here as conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes.

Conflicts provide us with two opposing ideas, practices or solutions that appear to be incompatible, each only able to thrive in the absence of the other. Conflicts may present themselves as competing logics, each with their supportive constituency, or as an antagonism where the two poles in the conflict are seen as each other's enemy, which renders peaceful co-existence impossible (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). For example, the representative democratic logic behind bureaucratic administration says that only elected political representatives can make authoritative political decisions. This logic conflicts with the democratic logic of co-creation, according to which relevant and affected actors should be involved in making the decisions that affect their lives. The conflict seems to be irreconcilable, since political decisions cannot simultaneously be the prerogative of elected politicians and a result of inclusive and self-managed co-creation processes.

Dilemmas present us with an either/or choice, where one of two equally (un-)attractive options may be chosen at the expense of the other (Hann 2001).

Dilemmas are often normative, pertaining to what social or political actors consider good/bad or right/wrong. They are forced to choose one of the options despite preferring either both or neither of them. Hence, dilemmas appear to be emotionally stressful. To illustrate, public managers and employees may persistently ask themselves whether it is best to treat all citizens according to fixed bureaucratic rules and provide uniform services to ensure equality versus involving citizens in co-producing and co-creating needs-based solutions that may vary from citizen to citizen. Public officials may also face a dilemma between insisting on professional evidence-based treatment of individual cases and giving users and citizens the voice and space necessary for self-determination. Finally, they may consider whether to save costs by contracting out services or to improve service quality by engaging in time- and resource-demanding processes of collaborative innovation. Incommensurable administrative logics may put managers and employees in a situation where the choice of the 'right' option becomes very difficult.

Finally, paradoxes are defined as 'contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time' (Lewis & Smith 2011: 386). Each of the elements may seem logical in and of themselves, yet irrational when combined. Together they constitute a duality of mutually related but contradictory elements. Paradoxes may be detected through the identification of double binds, mixed messages or systemic tensions (Putnam 1986). Double binds are ironic phenomena where something emerges as a result of the attempt to do the opposite: performance management may lower performance levels, support from individuals may empower the group as a whole, inclusion is obtained through exclusion and so on (Lewis & Smith 2014). Mixed messages are when an explicitly communicated message is contradicted in practice. A leader or manager talks about trusting their team, but nevertheless persistently monitors and controls its work (Lüscher & Lewis 2008). Finally, systemic tensions are when organizations are embedding contradictory yet related goals, principles, incentives, designs and the like (Lewis 2000). Hence, an organization may reward both compliance and innovation. A crucial detail regarding paradoxes is that they rule out the possibility for resolution through choice, compromise or consent, as both of the mutually exclusive elements in a paradox are considered to be legitimate and operate simultaneously (Cameron & Quinn 1988).

It is not difficult to find examples of paradoxes relating to co-creation in public organizations. Hence, while co-creation is hampered by bureaucratic red tape, the existence of some ground rules may help to facilitate fruitful interaction and trust-based collaboration between public and private actors engaged in co-creation. While co-creation favours input from lay actors aiming to put the needs and experiences at the forefront, the co-creation of innovative solutions will tend to benefit from the professional knowledge and expertise

of professionally trained public employees. Finally, while high-powered performance management may hamper creative problem-solving and competition may undermine collaboration, co-creation processes requiring continuous evaluation to maximize impact and competition between different co-creating partnerships may spur innovation.

3.6   ASSESSING THE CHALLENGE

Conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes will likely emerge in the wake of the expansion of co-creation as a new key idea and practice in the public sector. But is it really a problem? NPM expanded within a public sector that was thoroughly bureaucratic and that also stirred many conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes, so why bother to analyse the constraining conditions for the current expansion of co-creation? The answer is that the current situation with the introduction of co-creation is different from the situation in which NPM expanded. NPM was not an addition to bureaucracy, but rather a sweeping, government-driven reform movement aiming to break down and replace bureaucracy with an entirely new way of governing the public sector and its relation to society and the economy. After more than half a century of undisputed reign, bureaucracy was subjected to heavy criticism and was on the retreat. In many places, NPM was seen as the saviour of the public sector, which was becoming increasingly ossified; and where it clashed with key aspects of bureaucracy, there was little doubt that bureaucracy would have to yield.

With the introduction of co-creation, the situation is entirely different. After the NPM revolution, a compromise between OPA and NPM was struck, and the two governance paradigms have merged into a NPG orthodoxy. This is evidenced by how most public leaders appear to support a combination of key traits of bureaucracy and NPM that have gradually become the new normal. Although NPG has since criticized NPM for its exaggerated belief in market efficiency and its reassertion of top-down control based on the performance management of local units, co-creation has not been introduced as a part of a reform movement aiming to demolish the existing governance orthodoxy; rather, its key co-creation component has been introduced as a tool alongside existing tools – not as a replacement. Moreover, co-creation is not driven by central government instructions, instead often being introduced at the local or regional level as a result of either internal learning or inspiration from external actors, such as researchers, consultants, or public leaders from other jurisdictions (see Torfing et al. 2022). Co-creation is therefore likely to be met with more resistance, which typically generates fiercer conflicts and more dilemmas and paradoxes.

The emergence of conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes may tend to make co-creation an uphill struggle. However, there is no reason to assert that the

expansion of co-creation will be halted by the experience of friction; not only are most people capable of tolerating a considerable degree of tension and dissonance, but many respond to problems and barriers by seeing them as challenges to be overcome – or at least dealt with in a way that allows them to advance their undertaking. The next chapter examines how the leaders and managers of co-creation can cope with the emerging conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes that are triggered by the competing and coexisting governance paradigms in the public sector.

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