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Published in:
Advancing Cocreation in Local Governance

DOI:
[10.4337/9781802202236.00008](https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802202236.00008)

Publication date:
2024

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (APA):
Røiseland, A., Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2024). What to do when co-creation clashes with old public governance paradigms? In A. Røiseland, E. Sørensen, & J. Torfing (Eds.), *Advancing Cocreation in Local Governance: The Role of Coping Strategies and Constructive Hybridization* (pp. 1-14). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802202236.00008>

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1. What to do when co-creation clashes with old public governance paradigms?

Asbjørn Røiseland, Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing

1.1 HOW TO ALIGN OLD AND NEW FORMS OF PUBLIC GOVERNANCE?

At its very core, the public sector is a bureaucracy. Weberian-style bureaucracy is based on a clear separation between politics and administration, centralized control within hierarchical organizations, a horizontal division of labour between line agencies, focus on legality and rule compliance, and the merit-based recruitment of professional public employees who are supposed to pursue the general interest rather than their own. Compared to the rule of clans, kings and charismatic leaders making arbitrary decisions and traditional forms of rule based on religious dogmas, the introduction of bureaucracy at the turn of the twentieth century was a blessing.

Bureaucracy was the dominant paradigm for more than half a century, remaining largely uncontested until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when, first, public choice theorists such as Downs (1967) and Niskanen (1971), and later neoliberal and neoconservative political leaders such as US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher began to attack its alleged rigidity, paternalism and inefficiency. The criticism of bureaucracy gave rise to a frantic search for new ways of organizing, leading and governing the public sector and its attempt to regulate society and the economy. Hence, in the last 30–40 years, we have seen the emergence of several alternative governance paradigms. First, Old Public Administration (OPA) based on bureaucracy and professional rule was supplemented and supplanted by New Public Management (NPM), which placed a premium on marketization, performance management and managerialism (Hood 1991; Osborne & Gaebler 1993). Subsequently, NPM was criticized by advocates of Digital Era Governance (Dunleavy et al. 2006), the Neo-Weberian State (Bouckaert 2023; Pollitt &

Bouckaert 2004) and Public Value Management (Moore 1995), which aimed to spur digitalization, classical bureaucratic values and public entrepreneurialism, respectively. Finally, both OPA and NPM were challenged and superseded to some degree by New Public Governance (NPG) (Osborne 2006), which aimed to advance trust-based management and collaborative governance in networks and partnerships in order to enhance public innovation.

The result of the development from OPA, via NPM, to NPG has triggered a gradual yet incomplete shift in the perception of the public sector from being, first, an almighty public authority, then an efficient service provider, and finally an arena for collaborative governance and co-creation (Torfing et al. 2019). However, the introduction of NPG paradigms does not seem to have led to the disappearance of the old paradigms, which continue to exist and condition the expansion and impact of the new ones (Torfing et al. 2020). This means that the new ideas about the active involvement of citizens, neighbourhoods and stakeholders in the co-creation of innovative public value outcomes through emergent collaboration, learning and creative problem solving tends to co-exist with relatively entrenched ideas about centralized rule-based administration, competition between public and private service contractors, and the performance management of public and private service delivery focusing on the achievement of pre-determined outcomes.

The co-existence between the different public governance paradigms is anything but peaceful (Koppenjan & Koliba 2013). Co-creation, defined as the collaborative effort of distributed actors to enhance public value production through creative problem solving, tends to problematize and clash with institutionalized practices that seek to maintain bureaucratic control or to promote competition and performance efficiency rather than trust-based collaboration and innovation (Christensen 2021; Torfing et al. 2020). The clash between the growing appreciation of co-creation and the institutionally embedded practices associated with OPA and NPM raise questions about how new and old forms of public governance can be aligned. Old forms of governance may prevent public and private actors from benefitting from new ideas and practices. In the worst case, the public sector will be stuck in the mud, as previous forms of governance may suffer from declining efficiency while new forms of governance cannot realize their full potential, because their expansion and functioning are hampered by past governance paradigms.

Public managers may choose to ignore the clash between new and old governance paradigms. Some might even cling to or side with the old governance paradigms that they have internalized as part of their daily practices and standard operating procedures. Others may become increasingly frustrated by the fact that the old is dying, while the new cannot be fully born. This latter group may go as far as to ponder how to deal with and perhaps even mitigate the tensions and clashes between the old and the new.

In some countries and parts of the public sector, there is growing recognition of the need to mobilize societal resources in and through the co-creation of innovative public value outcomes (Ansell & Torfing 2021a). The turn to co-creation remains mostly ideational, but there are growing attempts to co-create new and bold solutions to wicked problems, such as the climate crisis, urban decay and gang-related crime, by bringing in distributed actors within a certain niche and stimulating processes of collaborative innovation. To reap the fruits of the current embrace of co-creation as a tool for complex problem solving, public managers must find ways of coping with the emerging conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes arising from the clashes with traditional forms of bureaucracy and the new competition-based performance regime by negotiating the meaning and use of co-creation and adjusting the established forms of local government.

There is no ‘one best way’, when it comes to developing and deploying coping strategies capable of easing the tensions between different ways of governing and being governed. Some of the coping strategies may fail to accommodate the new in the context of the old, while others will succeed in establishing a new adaptive governance synthesis that combines the best of the old with the best of the new or creates the conditions for peaceful coexistence (Bourgon 2011). However, some coping strategies will be better at confronting and tackling the emerging conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes than other strategies, and, over time, organizational learning may expand the toolbox available to public managers. Ideally, public managers should become ‘bricoleurs’ and engage in practices of ‘constructive hybridization’ that allow them to benefit from new co-creation practices in contexts characterized by competing and co-existing public governance paradigms (Carstensen et al. 2021; Koppenjan et al. 2019).

1.2 THE RISE OF CO-CREATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

In recent years, the co-creation concept has played a growing role in business management and marketing, where private firms increasingly perceive their customers as partners in processes of joint value production (Grönroos 2011; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2002, 2004; Vargo et al. 2008). In public administration research, the co-creation concept is new, although one could argue that the idea of co-creation has a somewhat longer intellectual history (Ind & Coates 2013).

One example of a precursor to the current focus on co-creation is the work of Follett (1918). Her theory of integration helps us to understand how to overcome conflict in ways that go beyond both imposition and compromise. The integration of different and conflicting views not only involves deliber-

ation but also joint action. Hence, the goal of integration is for opponents to work together to create a new collective solution that did not previously exist (Wright 2022).

Another example of a precursor is the work of the Ostroms, who discovered back in the 1970s how collaboration with citizens could be an asset to public service organizations (Ostrom & Whitaker 1973; Ostrom et al. 1978). In the following decades, they continued their studies of how public and private actors interact in institutional arenas to produce joint solutions to common problems. Even if the Ostroms merely talked about ‘co-production’, they came close to developing a co-creation concept *avant la lettre* (Ostrom 1990, 1996), and we believe they probably would have talked about co-creation had the concept been part of the conceptual toolbox at that time.

However, back when the Ostroms were writing about polycentric coordination and co-production in the 1980s and 1990s, the actual take-up of the new ideas about producing public outcomes based on the mobilization of the complementary resources of public administrators and private citizens and stakeholders was limited due to the predominance of NPM, which viewed citizens as customers choosing between competing public and/or private service providers as opposed to active partners in the development of service solutions and public problem solving. After the fiscal crisis in 2008, the support for NPM waned and the interest in co-creation grew, partly due to an acute need to mobilize societal resources to make ends meet in the cash-strapped public sector. However, the focus was more on the co-production of discrete services rather than on the co-creation of broader public value outcomes (see Osborne & Stokosch 2013).

The introduction of co-creation appears to be strongest in countries with traditions for civic participation and/or corporatist negotiation between state and peak interest organizations, and in policy areas such as urban development, public health and environmental sustainability (Ansell & Torfing 2021a). However, examples of co-creation can be found in countries around the world and in most policy sectors (Torfing et al. 2019). Indeed, in countries with weak or failed states, private entrepreneurs and international donor organizations often attempt to co-create public value solutions (Ansell et al. 2022; Ziervogel et al. 2022). But even though many contemporary and historical examples of what we will now label co-creation can be found in many countries, there is still a long way to go before co-creation becomes mainstream at the local- and regional-government levels.

The embrace of co-creation may be accelerating in the years to come, since international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) are campaigning for the expansion of co-creation. The United Nations (UN) has gone so far as to insist that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must

be achieved through ‘partnerships for the goals’ (UN 2015), which is clearly a call for co-creation (see Ansell et al. 2022). The efforts to respond to crisis and turbulence (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic) also seem to have stimulated interest in co-creation (de Silva et al. 2022).

The rising interest in co-creation among public managers is spurred by five crucial factors. First, there is an urgent need to mobilize and activate a broad range of societal resources to mitigate the cross-pressure created by increasing citizen expectations of the public sector and scarcity of public resources that are increasingly stretched to cope with a growing number of global crises and national emergencies (Sancino 2022). Second, the educational and anti-authoritarian revolutions tend to increase the number of competent, critical and assertive citizens who demand to do more and to be more actively involved in public governance than the traditional forms of representative democracy allow (Bovaird & Loeffler 2016). Third, the pervasiveness of wicked problems that are ill-defined and difficult-to-solve calls for the co-creation of innovative solutions based on mutual learning and the development of joint ownership (Weber & Khademan 2008). Fourth, the social cohesion in modern societies is threatened by the rise of individualism, social fragmentation and political polarization, which generates an acute need to bring together a diversity of relevant and affected actors in pragmatic problem-solving processes (Sørensen 2020). Finally, democratic participation must be deepened to bridge the widening gulf between the governing elites and ordinary citizens, which fuels the rise of populist movements led by authoritarian leaders (Barber 2003).

While co-creation in this way may offer a near-perfect response to fundamental needs of society and the public sector, we should be careful to avoid a functional explanation of the rise of co-creation that neglects the role of social and political agency. Revisiting the motivation of key actors to support and engage in co-creation enables us to see why it is gaining momentum and why we see a growing number of attempts to build platforms and arenas that reduce the transaction costs of collaborating to foster innovative governance solutions (Ansell & Gash 2018).

Starting with the elected politicians, there seems to be growing recognition of the fact that interaction with citizens and stakeholders can help to strengthen the exercise of political leadership by providing valuable input to understanding problems, designing solutions and mustering support for their implementation (Hendriks & Lees-Marshment 2019; Sørensen 2020). For their part, public managers have long understood that they require input from societal actors, including citizens and local communities, to solve complex problems such as inner-city decay, the degradation of habitats, gang-related crime and the regulation of watersheds (Buuren et al. 2019; Degnegaard et al. 2015).

Public employees seem to be clearly aware of how they can only realize their high professional goals and aspirations by involving citizens and stake-

holders in the production of high-quality service solutions (Alves 2012; De Silva et al. 2022; Nambisan & Nambisan 2013). Businesses and civil society actors seem to realize that they can gain more influence on public governance by actively engaging in creative problem-solving processes than by sticking to their classical role as external pressure groups (Lindgreen et al. 2019; Ma et al. 2020; Redlich et al. 2019; Sørensen & Torfing 2018). Finally, many citizens increasingly seek to become part of meaningful communities and to influence the governance decisions that shape the conditions for their everyday lives (Heimburg & Ness 2021; Terkelsen et al. 2022). Co-creation may mean different things to different actors, but the multivocality of the concept is exactly what generates the widespread support for the introduction of various forms of co-creation (see Padgett & Ansell 1993).

The proverbial snake in paradise is that some privileged actors may feel that their power and influence is threatened by co-creation that seeks to redistribute power across sectors, levels and organizations by involving a broad range of relevant and affected actors to participate in the authoritative allocation of values for society. Hence, both the charismatic rule of a strong local mayor and the ability of big business and other pressure groups to use personal contacts and informal channels to sway government decisions is undermined by inclusive forms of co-creation. In addition, there is often considerable mistrust between the public, private and civic sector, which prevents crosscutting collaboration. Finally, co-creation tends to disturb the institutional logics of appropriate action in the public sector, thereby disrupting well-established procedures, habits and classifications. As such, it is not difficult to understand why the embrace of co-creation has been more ideational than practical. Still, co-creation holds a promise of reinvigorating public governance and liberal democracy by highlighting the need for active and direct participation, collaborative problem solving and innovative public value outcomes (Ansell & Torfing 2021a).

1.3 DEFINING CO-CREATION

At a generic level, co-creation can be defined in a minimalist way as a collaborative process according to which two or more relevant and affected actors from the public, private and third sectors exchange and process experiences, knowledge and ideas in order to define and solve public problems by producing new and bold public value outcomes. Ideally, the actors are interacting on an equal footing. This does not require that the actors have the same quantity or quality of resources to influence joint decisions, but rather that they recognize their mutual dependency and the need to create space and opportunities for each other respectfully, so that the different and indispensable inputs can all receive a fair hearing and contribute to producing a collective impact (Kania

& Kramer 2011). Hence, co-creation draws on the complementary resources of different actors to produce joint solutions in the field of service production (e.g. health, education, eldercare), regulation (environmental policy, technology development, business support) and authoritative decision making (building permits, planning decisions, placement of children in foster care). The goal is to solve common problems through the constructive management of difference (Gray 1989) leading to more or less creative solutions (Ansell & Torfing 2021b).

It is important to note that the definition of co-creation presented above implies that participation should not merely take the form of a consultation of relevant and affected private actors after public actors have designed a new governance solution; rather, genuine co-creation requires the active involvement of societal actors in the early phases, when the agenda is set, problems are defined and the search for solutions begins. Moreover, it goes without saying that co-creation, as defined above, holds little in common with the Big Society initiative of former British governments that aimed to cut the public sector and to transfer heavy social tasks and responsibility to weak social communities that often have problems shouldering the new assignments (Parker et al. 2022). Co-creation is not a zero-sum game between the public and private sectors, but rather a plus-sum game in which enhanced interaction leads to improved and even innovative solutions. Finally, it should be clear that co-creation involves collaboration between public and private actors rather than the outsourcing of public services to private contractors based on the construction of competitive quasi-markets.

Co-creation aspires to create public value outcomes (i.e. solutions that have value for the public and that the public considers valuable). A conflict may arise between the intention to do something good for the public, such as reducing CO₂ emissions to curb the climate crisis, and what is considered valuable by the public, who may not like the idea of higher fuel taxes. The negotiation of competing conceptions and aspects of public value is an integral part of co-creation and underlines its political character (digging into competing priorities) and the fact that it is imbued with multiple forms of power (power to, power over and power with).

Applying co-creation as an analytical concept inevitably raises questions about the relationship to neighbouring concepts, such as collaborative governance and co-production (Torfing et al. 2019). Ansell and Torfing (2021a) contend that whereas the parent concept of collaborative governance tends to focus on the involvement of interest organizations and civil society organizations in collaborative processes orchestrated by public authorities aiming to align relevant and affected actors and enhance the legitimacy of public governance, co-creation is a more distributed process in which public and private actors, including lay actors such as users, citizens, community

leaders and social entrepreneurs, engage in creative problem solving to create solutions that enjoy widespread support and are based on the needs of the affected actors. In short, co-creation involves a broader set of actors and is not controlled by government actors. Moreover, it requires learning-based efforts to uncover the needs behind the demands raised by the participating actors. As such, co-creation can be defined as collaborative governance infused with elements of social entrepreneurship (Phillips et al. 2015) and social learning (Reed et al. 2010). In addition, co-creation tends to stress the importance of creative problem solving in the face of hard-to-solve problems where standard solutions have been tried and found wanting. When public and private actors confront wicked and unruly problems, they must engage in processes of mutual learning and develop and test new and bold solutions that may lead to more or less radical and/or incremental innovations (Ansell & Torfing 2021a). The focus on learning, experimentation and creative problem solving is not typically found in the literature of collaborative governance in networks and partnerships, where the emphasis is more on knowledge sharing and joint coordination.

Ansell and Torfing (2021b) argue that whereas co-production involves public service producers and private service-users in the joint production and delivery of pre-determined public services, co-creation aims to involve a broader range of actors in the creation of new and innovative service systems, planning strategies or governance solutions (Osborne & Stokosch 2013). Brandsen and Honingh (2018: 13) make a similar type of argument: that co-creation concerns strategic-level services, whereas co-production is generally associated with the implementation phase in the production cycle. Even public service theory has gradually started to distinguish between co-production as a linear and product-dominant conception versus co-creation as a value creation process based on service users' wider life experience, which is then transformed into value through a dynamic relationship between the involved partners (Grönroos 2011; Osborne 2018). Although these conceptions of co-creation versus co-production are quite different, they share something important in common: they all underline how co-creation presupposes the acceptance and acknowledgement of a wide set of actors and resources to be exchanged for the purpose of creating new and unique solutions to a given challenge (Røiseland 2023).

The recent attempts at distinguishing co-creation from the parent concept of collaborative governance and the twin concept of co-production tend to stress the distributed interaction between manifold stakeholders, including users and citizens and their contribution to public innovation. This amounts to a maximalist definition of co-creation as a distributed process of collaborative innovation that is more demanding and restrictive than the generic definition presented above. For example, it is a tall order that the collaboration between

distributed actors must result in the production of innovative solutions in order for it to qualify as a case of co-creation. Less may suffice.

Our solution to this definitional problem is to see the broad range of collaborative processes and arrangements that fall somewhere between the minimal and maximal definitions of co-creation as instances of co-creation. Hence, for a governance practice to be an instance of co-creation, it is sufficient that it meets the demands of the minimalist definition stressing the collaborative effort to produce public value outcomes, although it may aspire to comply with the more demanding demands of the maximalist definition, which emphasizes the distributed processes through which a plethora of actors engage in collaborative innovation. This solution puts conceptual bounds on co-creation while allowing empirical variation.

1.4 THE CLASH BETWEEN CO-CREATION AND EXISTING PUBLIC GOVERNANCE PARADIGMS

The emphasis on the problem-focused collaboration in networks and partnerships makes co-creation an integral part of NPG (Osborne 2006; Torfing & Triantafillou 2013), which aims to provide a pluricentric network alternative to the unicentric forms of public bureaucracy and the multicentric forms of market governance proffered by NPM (Kersbergen & Warden 2004). In co-creation processes, hierarchical control is supposedly replaced by horizontal interaction in networks and partnerships, while collaboration replaces market-based competition. The horizontal collaboration between interdependent public and private actors is conditioned by mutual trust and respect. As such, co-creation is a central feature of NPG.

As mentioned above, new and emerging paradigms such as NPG tend to clash with the old and co-existing governance paradigms. Public governance paradigms may indeed also complement and reinforce each other in some ways but given how new governance paradigms tend to develop in opposition to the old ones and in response to problems accumulated in the previous governance paradigms, clashes are to be expected. Unfortunately, the theoretical and practical incommensurability between the ideas and practices of co-creation promoted by NPG and the centralized control and market-based competition of OPA and NPM are not easily removed. Despite the problems inherent to the old governance paradigms, they continue to serve important and cherished functions and enjoy widespread support. Hence, they cannot simply be eradicated or relegated to a marginal position to make room for co-creation. Old and new governance paradigms will both co-exist and challenge each other (Torfing et al. 2020), meaning that the introduction of new paradigms and governance practices, such as co-creation in a public sector with strong path-dependencies, will foster a series of conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes,

where opposed but equally valid principles and demands call for solutions surpassing a simple choice between good and bad, right or wrong and so forth.

The main argument made in this book is that the growing appreciation and practical usage of co-creation in the public sector will trigger conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes that public managers and employees must learn to cope with to reap the fruits of co-creation. Hence, instead of denying their existence, public managers and employees must tackle the conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes head-on and find constructive ways of mitigating their negative impact and making the most of the conflicting but conjoined logics they are facing in an effort to expand the use of co-creation as a new and important governance tool for enhancing the production of innovative public value outcomes. As such, we are arguing that the current turn to co-creation must be accompanied by self-reflexive efforts to adapt and transform incommensurable practices in order to reduce the number of clashes and promote the relatively peaceful and non-obstructive coexistence of different governance practices. Such a self-reflexive and transformative governance practice may involve both attempts at re-articulating the meaning and application of co-creation together with efforts to remove the barriers to its expansion.

1.5 THE AIM OF THIS BOOK

Against this background, this book aims to provide a theoretical framing and empirical investigation of how public officials, including elected politicians, public managers and professional employees, engage with co-creation and seek to cope with the conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes that emerge from the expansion of co-creation in public sector environments that, due to their continued commitment to sovereign political leadership, bureaucratic governance, professional rule, performance management and marketization, are relatively hostile to co-creation.

The theoretical part of the book will revisit both the bright and dark sides of co-creation, discussing the factors that may support its further expansion. It will also explore the potential conflicts and synergies between co-creation and key features of OPA and NPM. Finally, drawing on complexity and paradox theory, it will define and provide an overview and classification of different coping strategies that managers in public service organizations may use to deal with the conflicts, dilemmas and paradoxes arising from inter-paradigmatic clashes. The claim is that, in most cases, people can cope with the clashes and tensions created by the introduction of co-creation by adopting coping strategies that fall broadly into three categories: separation strategies aiming to keep conflicting governance logics apart; compromise strategies aiming to find a balance between opposed governance logics; and integration strategies

aiming to find creative ways of dissolving the tension by combining incompatible governance logics in a synergistic way.

The use of coping strategies to deal with tensions will be discussed under the heading ‘constructive hybridization’; a concept that we will coin and advance as a key to understanding the introduction of new management practices in contexts characterized by discursive and institutional diversity. Hence, as the number of governance paradigms multiply and begin to collide, the pragmatic construction of hybrid forms of governance becomes a must.

The theoretical framework that we develop will guide empirical studies investigating how public officials have tried to cope with tensions between co-creation and established governance practices, what the result has been, and what lessons can be learned. As the methodological chapter explains, the empirical studies will draw on interviews, observations and document studies conducted in the field of three different policy areas: child protection (exercise of authority), climate change mitigation (public planning and regulation) and eldercare (public service provision). Data will be collected in three Norwegian municipalities, all of which place co-creation high on the agenda.

The book closes with some brief comments on the arguments, points and findings presented. Hence, we have asked an esteemed public administration researcher and a bold and outspoken public manager with experience in stimulating co-creation to comment and reflect on the main messages that the book makes and to offer their thoughts about how we learn to cope with the tensions arising from the continued expansion of co-creation practices in public organizations.

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