

Co-production in government: why, when and how?

21 March 2017



Roundtable with Professor Tony Bovaird & Dr Elke Loeffler



Background and intent

The Policy Project hosted a roundtable for senior officials with experts on co-production in government, Professor Tony Bovaird (Emeritus Professor at the University of Birmingham) and Dr Elke Loeffler (Chief Executive of the non-profit Governance International).

The session was designed to understand what is meant by ‘co-production’ and how a co-production approach might be applied to various aspects of government activity – policy, regulation, service delivery – to build public value. The session looked at local and international co-production examples and examined the benefits of, and barriers to, co-production. It raised questions about how a co-production approach could support government moving from a direct provider to a broker, facilitator, partner and commissioner of public services.

Co-production is “professionals and citizens making better use of each other’s assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency”.

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What do we mean by co-production?

The term co-production is often used interchangeably with collaboration and consultation. Governance International has a more precise definition that articulates the ‘what’ as well as the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of producing together.

Definitions of co-production

"It takes two – professionals and communities"

“Co-production is about professionals and citizens making better use of each other’s assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency.”

<http://www.govint.org/our-services/co-production/>



What isn't co-production of public services

Who is involved?	Involvement of service users and communities		
Involvement of professionals	Level of involvement	high	low
	high	Co-production	Traditional service provision
	low	Self-help	Little service provision

Co-production is much more than simply seeking people’s ideas or workshopping ideas together. It comprises any and all of the following: co-commissioning; co-designing; co-delivery; and co-assessment.

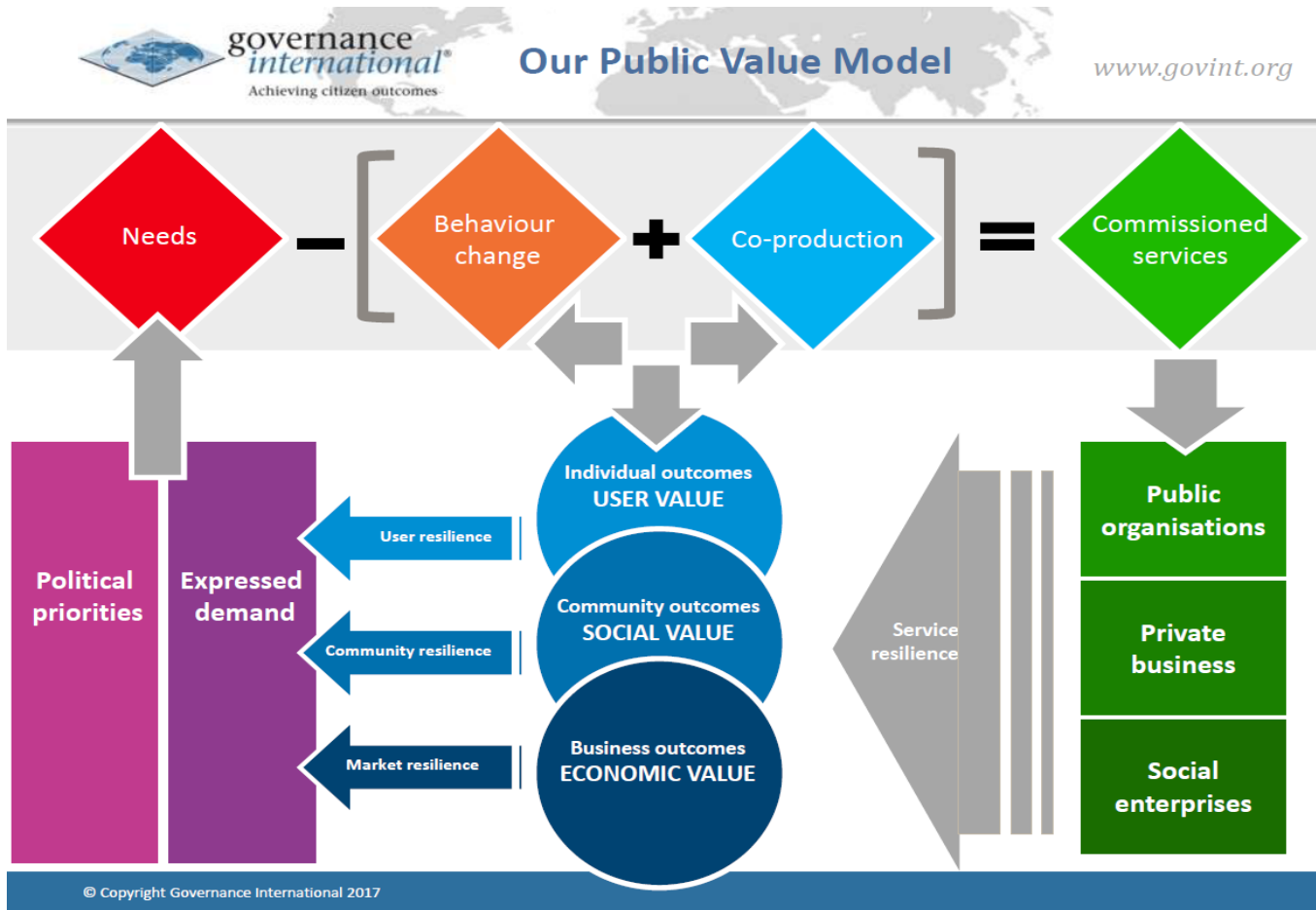
Benefits of a co-production approach...

- Multiple outcomes – it can help move beyond a focus on outcomes for individuals to think about desirable community and business outcomes. It can produce value for users, society and the economy over and above the services that result from it.
- Multiple lenses – it can help build shared understanding of what individuals might want or need, but also what is feasible and viable from other perspectives (including a government or service provider perspective).
- Multiple applications – it can be applied in a much wider array of settings than we might initially assume. It requires us to recognise the sense of and desire for agency that citizens have in day to day life – they are not just passive ‘service users’
- Multiple metrics – it can help frame a richer understanding of service impact and accountability for service. For example, rather than focusing only on what is delivered, accountability indicators should include what is working and where there is improvement (or not), by asking:
 - Is the service getting better?
 - Is this making people feel better about the service?
 - Is it building public value?
- It supports a shift from controlling costs to creating value.



Building public value...

Co-production is not an end in itself. It is part of the equation to build public value.



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Barriers to successful co-production...

Co-production can be derailed if some of the foundations are not in place:

- Intent is not sufficiently outcome-based. There needs to be a clear evidence-base and agreed understanding about cause and effect
- Lack of targeted experimentation prior to wholesale roll-out – solutions (and assumptions) need to be well tested
- Lack of capability and experience – government professionals are often not good at helping people to help themselves and/or matching their efforts to community offers. There is a tendency to focus attention only on the services provided ‘to’ people in the community not ‘with’ them
- The ‘co’ element requires a genuine commitment and active engagement of public service professionals in the co-production process – and therefore some loss of control (which we tend to not relinquish easily).

Generally not very outcome-based, need to develop evidence-based cause-and-effect chains

Lack of targeted experimentation and implementation across public services

Staff not yet practiced in systematic “helping people to help themselves”, e.g through ‘capabilities’ mapping and ‘matching of community offers’ in the public sector

Overcoming the barriers to co-production...

How might we overcome the barriers to co-production?

- Embrace co-production as a *way of doing things* throughout the policy-implementation life-cycle. Governance International suggest the following:

- 1. Developing a clear public outcomes framework (with measurable improvements of outcomes) and clear pathways from co-production to these outcomes**
- 2. Harnessing skills, resources and contributions of citizens (in particular so-called disadvantaged groups) AND staff**
- 3. Linking co-production initiatives to sustainable public budgets through demand management**
- 4. Ensuring co-production embraces good governance, including social integration**
- 5. Leadership which focuses on implementation of co-production, not just talkshops**




Local examples of co-production...

Participants offered a few examples of co-production in the NZ context:

- SKIP <https://www.skip.org.nz/> which provides support, information and parenting strategies for parents and caregivers of children up to 5 years old.
- Whanau ora <https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/whakamahia/whanau-ora/> a health initiative driven by Māori cultural values to empower communities and extended families (**whānau**) to support families within the community context rather than individuals within an institutional context.
- Initiatives developed under the auspices of the BPS Results (eg, drama classes in schools with an immunisation message and NCEA credits) <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/better-public-services>

How do we learn from and leverage the lessons from examples like these?



“We focus so much on the government’s investment, with a mental block about the investment others put in” ...

Whānau Ora

S . k . I . P

Strategies with Kids | Information for Parents

Building co-production capability...

Governance International suggests 'steps' to build co-production capability.



Five steps towards CitizenPoweredPublicServices

Toolkit for a five step transformation process to improve co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery and co-assessment:



- Map** existing co-production approaches and new opportunities (Co-production Explorer)
- Focus** on those with highest impact (Co-production Priority-Matrix)
- People** your co-production approaches (Capabilities Assessment and Co-Production Labs)
- Market** the behaviour change (Outcomes Assessment and Co-production Charter)
- Grow** co-production through culture and system change (Outcomes-based Commissioning).

Questions for consideration...

The session raised a range of questions for the NZ state sector...

- Does co-production, and services designed around peoples' needs require dramatic shifts in our current standardised and largely centralised system? Would we need to move to a more decentralised one? Or in practice, is service delivery less uniform than we assume (e.g. local staff use work-arounds that head offices are not always aware of). How might we draw insights and learn from some of these 'work arounds' to inform future policy?
- How could we apply a co-production perspective to, for example, aspects of the Investment Approach? Across the four elements of co-commissioning; co-designing; co-delivery; and co-assessment?
- How might a co-production framework enable us to bridge the policy-operations divide? How could we build a co-production approach into each stage of the policy to delivery value chain?
- What might it take to move beyond 'consultation on proposals' or even eliciting ideas for solutions towards co-production that starts from building consensus with multiple players on cause, effect, and agreed outcomes?
- How can we build an accountability and rewards framework that is not just about singular accountability (of individuals or agencies) to accommodate contributions and investment by multiple actors and organisations (inside and outside government)?
- How can effective co-production support the modern role of government as broker, facilitator, catalyst and 'nudger' – doing things with citizens and business not to them (as the traditional deliverer/regulator).



Want to know more?

For more information on Elke and Tony's work see the contact details below.
You can also hear their lunchtime ANZSOG presentation here:

<https://www.anzsog.edu.au/resource-library/news-media/all-in-this-together-co-producing-services/?searchword=tony+bovaire>



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Further reading:

John Alford, *Engaging Public Sector Clients: from service-delivery to co-production*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009.

Elke Loeffler and Tony Bovaird, *User and community co-production of public services: what does the evidence tell us?*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, Vol 39, 2016.

Find out about the Policy Project at:
<https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/policyproject>

