



**BRITISH ACADEMY  
OF MANAGEMENT**

---

**BAM**  
CONFERENCE

---

**3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER**

**ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM**

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

**About BAM**

The British Academy of Management (BAM) is the leading authority on the academic field of management in the UK, supporting and representing the community of scholars and engaging with international peers.

<http://www.bam.ac.uk/>

# **BAM Developmental Paper, September 2019: Building and Sustaining High Performance Organisations During Uncertain Times: Challenges and Opportunities (Public Management and Governance Track)**

## **Developing an understanding of public service value and disvalue co-creation**

Steven Parker (De Montfort University, UK) [steven.parker@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:steven.parker@dmu.ac.uk)

Victoria Cluely (Cass Business School, City, University of London, UK) [victoria.cluley@city.ac.uk](mailto:victoria.cluley@city.ac.uk)

Zoe Radnor (Cass Business School, City, University of London, UK) [zoe.radnor@city.ac.uk](mailto:zoe.radnor@city.ac.uk)

Wendy Fitzgibbon (Leicester University, UK) [dwf5@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:dwf5@leicester.ac.uk)

## **Introduction and Context**

Public services are generally framed as state provided services that benefit the common good or that the public do not want to lose. This developmental paper focuses on the relationship between public value and co-creation in public services, and sets out the early stages of a new research project. We present some first steps towards re-thinking co-creation and co-production as a relational and changeable experience. Owing to the fact that public value and its process of emergence is often considered as implicitly positive (Voorberg et al 2015), we are particularly interested in settings where co-creation is coerced, unwanted, enforced and how it might be researched in future. This is an emerging field of study, but one where there has been little theorisation and empirical research (Steen et al 2018). The paper considers both theoretical and methodological developments in order to provide a strong foundation on which the concepts and practice of public value and co-creation can be understood.

The inclusion of service user voices in the development and improvement of public services, i.e. healthcare services, education and law enforcement, is now a key concern and co-production and co-creation represent common approaches. The value emergent from the interaction between the service user and the service provider is implicitly thought of as providing a positive outcome or experience and both parties tend to be conceptualised as benefiting from the interaction. For example, social services fulfil the service providers statutory duties and service users are provided a helpful service. Such benefits have been widely discussed in the literature, voiced as a response to a growing limitation of traditional policy design and changes to the nature of democratic involvement (Durose and Richardson 2016). There are also ‘wicked issues’ (McConnell 2018) where traditional policy design is argued as being no longer effective, seeing then a transition from the delivery of services in as mass institutions, to a more personalised approach including the voice of the user. These debates are current in practice and at the time of writing this paper, the UK Social Care Institute for Excellence are actively promoting their upcoming ‘national co-production week’<sup>1</sup> as an opportunity to ‘talk about power’ and ‘how this needs to be shared more equally with people who use services and carers’.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/week/>

While public value and its creation process now represent common approaches to service delivery, neither public value nor co-creation have universal definitions. Indeed they can mean different things to different people and so are concepts that require definition before use in order to ensure clarity (Brandsen and Honigh 2018). Here we base our understanding of public value on Meynardt's (2009) concept of 'public value inside' and how an individual's experience of public value is influenced by other people they interact with. In this way we see public value as a fluid and relational experience that will be different for different people depending on circumstance. Based on this our approach to co-creation (as the process from which public value emerges) necessarily focuses on the relationship between individuals, for example the client and the professional.

Co-creation is often used interchangeably with the term co-production. While this is often the case in practice (Voorberg et al 2015), each concept has distinct theoretical origins. Based on this we favour the concept of public value co-creation, owing to its theoretical roots in service dominant logic which affords the service user agency in the public value creation process (Osborne et al 2015). While this is eminently useful, we further seek to extent the service dominant logic approach to include factors in addition to the service user and the service provider in the co-creation process. Indeed, we propose a logic of assemblage in order to do this (Cluley and Radnor - forthcoming). To do this we draw on the philosophical approach outlined by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in their concept of assemblage. This allows value and its creation process to be seen as a changeable, relational and heterogeneous process that is experienced differently by different people, thus reflecting the reality of public service interaction.

Public service organisations are diverse settings with a need to manage the interplay between care and control. Public services are available to the public as a whole, meaning that the service user population is heterogeneous. These are all factors that both render the public service user experience unique to the individual and also that need to be considered when conceptualising value and its process of emergence. In practice co-creation is frequently unquestioned and seen in terms of acts which are implicitly valuable and useful (Voorberg et al 2015). As a process co-creation is thought to add public value by involving people in service delivery and design. Conversely, in reality, some people may be denied access whilst others may be forced to take part in it. Obvious examples include prisoners (those who want to avoid incarceration) and those who have been involuntarily been sectioned under mental health legislation), less obvious examples include those who are subject to institutional biases. In these circumstances, and many others, public value may not be the positive experience it is implicitly considered to be.

Our argument made here, moreover, is premised on the following three co-dependent position statements

1. Public value and its creation process are variously defined and current definitions do not adequately reflect the unique circumstances of public service practice.
2. Public value co-creation can be understood as a fluid, changeable and relational process through the application of a logic of assemblage. In this way public value can be seen as an experience that will be different for different people depending on experience and circumstance.
3. Based on the idea that public value is a heterogeneous experience, public value is unlikely to be a positive experience for all service users.

Based on these statements, we further propose that a phenomenological approach to the empirical investigation of service user experience based on a logic of assemblage will allow the reality of service use to be explored from the perspective of the service user themselves. This approach opens up a number of avenues for exploration, including service users who are denied co-creation opportunities because of legislation and policy. This is important as it illustrates how what is generally considered to be a positive experience (voluntary involvement of citizens) will be experienced differently in different settings (i.e. prisons). This means there will be a sliding scale between care and control informed by state policy, legislation, setting, and user group, as well as the nudging of service users.

In this paper we focus most directly on position statement three. As Steen et al (2018, p.284) “...the overall literature on co-creation and co-production of public services is optimistic with regard to its presumed effects”. Recent work has started to look at some of the potentially negative effects that may emerge from the public value experience, for example in neighbourhood watch and housing (Williams et al 2016) and the relationship between power dynamics and co-production (Farr 2018). To support this we now turn to develop a more in-depth discussion of ideas of what we term disvalue – defined as unwanted, coerced, destroyed and lost public value.

## **Value and Disvalue**

The conceptualisation of value and disvalue needs some further clarity. In the spirit of adding value to society the notion of value creation seems easy to understand and recognise in that it reflects popular moral norms. As discussed through the position statements value creation itself is not one, static experience; it involves multiple stakeholders and will be different for all involved. Each stakeholder will bring different perspectives and interpretations to the relationship based on their unique experiences. In this way the value creation process is eminently heterogeneous. This is something that is seldom acknowledged within current literature where the service relationship is often simplified as a homogeneous experience that includes an exchange between a service provider and a service user – the uniqueness and diversity of such an experience is glossed over. It is in this very uniqueness and diversity, however that problematizes the implicit assumption that public value and its creation process is positive.

In the public value management literature, value is typically described as being created, but different words have also been used to describe value that lies below this line, such as subtracted and destroyed (Benington 2011, 48), lost and displaced (Hartley et al, 2019, 11-12) or contaminated (Williams et al 2016). In the current literature, it is unclear if such words are used inter-changeably and mean different things. However, it is important to recognise that the idea of loss of coerced value is not new, indeed, as outlined and a number of studies are beginning to recognise this.

Additionally, in this literature, value creation and destruction tend to be imagined as opposites in tension. In reality, change may require loss and possibly destruction, to clear away what went before, thus affording some forms of disvalue as positive role. An example is child safeguarding where what is valuable to a family may be destroyed by the state, but with a plan to return to a future value equilibrium. In this difficult context - a key principle of the UK

Children Act<sup>2</sup> - is those involved in providing services should work "in partnership" with families and children who may be in need. This partnership working may be considered as a form of co-creation but must "balance the rights of children to be consulted, the rights of parents to exercise their responsibilities and the duty of the state to promote and protect children in need or at risk."

Indeed, the value that emerges in the specific example of safeguarding children is less clear cut, illustrating how the power balance between providers and users may eventually require the planned destruction of value in the experience of co-creation.

Alford (2016) also proposes the notion of obligates. This addresses the liminality of status between being a volunteer to being forced to engage in co-creation. This describes the move from co-creation as a complicit and mutually beneficial partnership to an enforced or coerced relationship, examples could include imprisonment, police enforcement, mental health sectioning and the safeguarding of vulnerable people.

We challenge some of the language used to describe loss and destruction. Setting out a practical agenda for researching disvalue, Steen et al (2018) set out a number of challenges to co-production, including minimising government responsibility, problems with accountability, the effect of co-production on our understanding of democracy, reinforcing inequalities, and how co-creation can lead to co-destruction. To frame their discussion, however, they use potentially disempowering language, talking about the 'dark side' and 'evils' of co-production. While this is language that is used in other literatures (e.g. see Larsson and Brandsen 2016; Wu 2017) it does not reflect the inclusive, anti-discriminatory ethos of public service practice. Indeed, when writing this paper, we explored these words with two senior managers promoting co-creation in social work and NHS England, both expressed concern regarding such language and thought the language would dissuade practitioners from engaging in research.

We propose the term disvalue as an umbrella term to capture the range of public value experiences that may not fit with the general perception that public value co-creation is a positive process for all. As part of this, we propose that it may be helpful to create a typology of loss whereby value is created or lost, suggesting a line of equilibrium that value moves above or below.

## **Advancing Empirical Research**

In order to develop our conceptual ideas, we are planning to work with a range of service users to explore the phenomenological experience of service use/value/disvalue creation. We will adopt a phenomenological approach in order to explore this experience from the perspective of service users themselves and intend to use photovoice to capture this.

Photovoice is a participatory action research method that developed within health promotion research (Wang and Burris 1994). The method allows access to experiences that a researcher would struggle to gain otherwise. It involves giving participants cameras to take photographs of their chosen experiences thus enabling them to gain a certain distance which allows a fresh perspective on their lives (Fitzgibbon and Stengel 2017). Participants are then asked to share their images and focused discussion develops as part of this process. The images and

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents>

participant talk will then be analysed using interpretive engagement (Drew and Guileman 2014). This framework allows the inclusion of all voices in the analysis, including the participant, researcher and audience. The photographs taken will also be exhibited to the public as an alternative and accessible form of dissemination (see Healy and Fitzgibbon 2019).

### **Conclusion and next steps**

In order to progress our conceptual work, we intend to publish a developmental conceptual paper furthering the notion of public service value co-creation to include disvalue. It is this conceptualisation that our conference presentation will address. We hope that it will spark debate and we welcome critique. Following our theoretical development, we will begin work on our empirical exploration which we are in the process of applying for grant funding to support.

### **References (Add new in below)**

- Alford, J. (2016) Co-Production, Interdependence and Publicness: Extending Public Service-Dominant Logic. *Public Management Review*, 18, 5, 673-691.
- Benington, J. (2011) From Private Choice to Public Value. In Benington, J. and Moore, M. (eds). *Public Value: Theory and Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brandsen, T. and Honigh, M. (2018) Definitions of Co-production and Co-creation, in Brandsen, T.; Steen, T. and Veschuere, B. (eds). *Co-production and Co-creation: Engaging Citizens in Public Services*. London: Routledge.
- Cluley, V. and Radnor, Z. (Forthcoming) Addressing co-creation's 'conundrums' through the application of a general logic of assemblage. *Cass Business School*.
- Drew, S. and Guilemin, M. (2014) From photographs to findings: visual meaning-making and interpretive engagement in the analysis of participant-generated images. *Visual Studies*, 29, 1, 54-6
- Durose, C. and Richardson, L. (2016) *Designing Public Policy for Co-Production: Theory, Practice and Change*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Farr, M. (2018) Power Dynamics and Collaborative Mechanisms in Co-production and Co-design Processes. *Critical Social Policy*, 38, 4, 623-644.
- Fitzgibbon W. and Stengel C. (2017) Women's voices made visible: Photovoice in visual criminology. *Punishment and Society* 6, 379-393
- Hartley, J., Parker, S., and Beashel, J. (2019). Leading and Recognizing Public Value. *Public Administration*, DOI: 10.1111/padm.12563
- Healy, D. and Fitzgibbon, W. (2019) 'Different Ways of Seeing: Exploring audience reactions to images of probation supervision' *Qualitative Social Work* First Published online 8<sup>th</sup> May <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325019845426>

Larsson, O and Brandsen, T. (2016) The Implicit Normative Assumptions of Social Innovation Research: Embracing the Dark Side in Brandsen, T., Cattacin, S., Evers, A. and Zimmer, A (eds.) *Social Innovations in the Urban Context*. Springer Open.

McConnell, A. (2018) Rethinking Wicked Problems as Political Problems and Policy Problems. *Policy and Politics*, 46, 1, 165-80.

Osborne, S.P., Radnor, Z., Kinder, T. and Vidal, I., (2015). The SERVICE framework: A public-service-dominant approach to sustainable public services. *British Journal of Management*, 26, 3, 424-438.

Steen, T., Brandsen, T. and Verschuere, B (2018). The Dark Side of Co-creation and Co-production” in Brandsen, T.; Steen, T. and Verschuere, B. (eds). *Co-production and Co-creation: Engaging Citizens in Public Services*. London: Routledge.

Voorberg, W.H., Bekkers, V.J. and Tummers, L.G., 2015. A systematic review of co-creation and co-production: Embarking on the social innovation journey. *Public Management Review*, 17(9), pp.1333-1357.

Wang, C. and Burris, M. (1994). Empowerment through Photo Novella: Portraits of Participation.” *Health Education and Behavior*, 21, 171-186.

Williams, B., K and, S. and Johnson, J. (2016) (Co)-Contamination as the Dark Side of Co-Production: Public value failures in co-production processes. *Public Management Review*, 18,5, 692-717.

Wu, L. (2017) The Bright Side and Dark Side of Co-production: a dyadic analysis. *Management Decision*, 55, 3, 614-631.