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# Facilitating coproduction: the role of leadership in coproduction initiatives in the UK

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of coproduction primarily refers to direct user involvement in the production of services. This paper identifies the main dimensions of this broad and at times fuzzy concept and focuses on types and styles of leadership that can emerge from, and sustain, effective coproduction practice. We do so by carrying out a narrative review of cases of coproduction in the UK, with a focus on the role of citizens, bureaucrats and, specifically, local politicians, to unpick how the latter can facilitate or hinder coproductive processes. The analysis distances itself from a traditional understanding of leadership to examine relational dynamics rather than organisation structures as the key variable of leadership within coproductive practices.

## KEYWORDS

Coproduction; facilitative leadership; local government; participatory planning; collaborative governance

## 1. Introduction

In the past decade, there has been a reawakening of interest in the concept of coproduction (Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Osborne, 2010; Pestoff, 2009). While coproduction can be intended generally as a way of providing services through the active involvement of professionals, service users and other members of the community (Bovaird, 2007), definitions of coproduction vary and empirical applications differ in a number of respects. Radically different processes in terms of objectives, actors, instruments and motivations are often included under the same label, whereby advancing critical analyses and theoretical speculation becomes more difficult.

Advocated by several think tanks such as the New Economics Foundation (Boyle and Harris 2009) and the Social Market Foundation (Griffiths et al., 2009), practitioner associations such as the Social Care Institute for Excellence (2013) among many others, coproduction is often seen as the cure of all ills with regard to service quality. *Increasingly self-confident and assertive citizens and the new forms of knowledge (often experience-based) they bring with them have entered the political arena* (Demszky & Nassehi, 2012). By enhancing people's diverse resources and assets the public sector can allow users to offer a valuable contribution to their community and facilitate a collaborative rather than paternalistic relationship

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between professionals and users (Fotaki, 2011), *but the tension between the knowledge of citizens and that of public actors needs recognising and addressing* (Delvaux & Schoenaers, 2012; Leino & Peltomaa, 2012).

A public reflection on power differentials and issues of legitimacy, the conditions and resources, as well as the type and style of leadership required for effective coproduction, is often missing. In fact, coproduction might well exacerbate inequalities without a priori investment in training of staff and a leadership able to facilitate participation from marginalised sectors. The relevance of coproduction to specific branches of public administration and politics demands a non-rhetorical examination of the interactions, values and interests emerging from those processes. Coproduction will often mean different things to citizens interested in having more control over services (and public resources) and institutional actors that might be allured by the promise of cutting costs and increase efficiency. In this respect, it will represent a challenge and an opportunity for different types of leadership (civic, administrative, political), as they try to reconcile different visions, often forcing a redefinition of traditional roles in the design, planning and provision of public services.

This paper reviews existing literature and empirical evaluations of coproduction initiatives to reflect on implications for leadership. We look at coproduction at the level of local government, where the proximity between public authorities, private actors and citizens is highest, and specifically on local leadership within coproduction processes, as a multifaceted phenomenon. Rather than looking at leadership as a set of personal attributes, our interest lies in leadership as a process involving practices and interactions of different types of roles and individuals (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010; Jain, 2004). To navigate the vast literature on leadership, we decided to focus on the literature on local government, and specifically local public services and local development (e.g. urban regeneration, housing, social care, healthcare, education and research). This allows us to define leadership in a more concrete context and highlight different types and styles of leadership to identify the most effective within coproductive practice.

The paper starts by narrowing down the constitutive elements of coproduction. Section 3 draws on the theory (and specifically the literature on distributed and facilitative leadership) to examine different forms of leadership, which could contribute to hindering or facilitating these processes. Section 4 reviews reports on cases of coproduction in the UK on a variety of policy areas, selected through a narrative review including academic and grey literature. The thematic analysis of these articles and reports helped us unpick the emergence of facilitative leadership of citizens, bureaucrats and politicians within coproduction processes. The final section discusses the findings, highlighting the role that leadership plays within these processes. By distancing the analysis from a traditional understanding of leadership as the fortune of the great men, the paper emphasises the collective character of leadership in coproduction.

## 2. The four dimensions of coproduction

Coproduction can be understood as *additive*, *voluntary* and *active*, *relational*, and both *individual* and *collective*. It is *additive* as it adds user inputs to regular production or introduces professional support to individual self-help or community self-organising. On the contrary, fully substitutive production, produced by individuals without interaction with public agencies should be understood as *parallel* production (Alford, 2009).

**Table 1.** The process of coproduction in four dimensions.

<i>Additive vs. Substitutive</i>	<i>Transactional vs. Relational</i>
<i>Passive vs. Active/</i>	<i>Individual vs. Collective</i>
<i>Voluntary vs. Compliant</i>	

Whitaker (1980) clearly distinguishes between compliance and co-operation, whereby coproduction entails the latter and is therefore *voluntary*: ‘Exercise of conscious, citizen influence on public services through “assistance” depends upon the citizen’s capacity to withhold or to give co-operation’ (p. 243).

Coproduction tends to develop in highly *relational* services, whereby interactions between users, professionals and policy-makers are frequent and the outcomes depend in large part on how successful such interactions are. Services that only involve short-term or sporadic interactions between the professional providers and citizens cannot be expected to result in the same pattern of interaction nor the same degree of participation as those found in a more stable, long-term demand situation or enduring welfare services (Pestoff, 2014).

Finally coproduction can be defined based on the type of involvement, whether for individual or collective services. Whereas collective coproduction is more relevant from an institutional perspective, with an emphasis on systemic transformations of the welfare state, individual coproduction is important for a micro-level analysis that focuses on the user’s transformation and traces the process of building trust and strengthening social capital. Brudney and England (1983) distinguish between *individualist*, *group* and *collective* forms of coproduction. They define *individualist* forms of coproduction as filling in a tax return, but personalisation of services in social care through individual budgets can also be understood as a form of individual coproduction. The danger with forms of individualised coproduction such as personalisation is that while certain users will be in a position to capitalise on the new level of agency and independence on offer, others will not and might end up with services of inferior quality. *Group* coproduction will bring certain categories of users together to shape or provide services. Finally, *collective* coproduction will go beyond that and translate into programmes that benefit the whole community rather than particular groups of users only. Table 1 summarises these four dimensions.

The risk is that, in contexts of limited individual and social capital and of deep cuts to services, public agencies might come to understand coproduction as individualised, transactional and substitutive (Miller & Stirling, 2004), entrenching patterns of hostility and/or off-loading the burden and costs of service delivery onto users. In this respect, coproduction, as well as the rhetoric on localism, might exacerbate class-based power asymmetries (Hastings & Matthews, 2015). Our review of empirical cases focuses on collective coproduction where the role of leadership emerges more clearly in driving the development of a shared vision and bridging across different motivations and interests involved in the coproductive process.

### 3. Leadership in coproduction process

#### 3.1. The challenges of coproductive relationships

Coproduction can take very different forms and involve different actors throughout the policy cycle. The literature primarily focuses on the complexity of the relationships between the service providers and the users who offer a direct contribution to the organisation providing

the services; therefore, it tends to focus on managers/bureaucrats and coproducers/citizens (Bovaird, 2007). However, other types of actors play a role within public services in local government, namely political representatives, who may have a direct or indirect role in the design and in the implementation of coproduction initiatives. A focus on how this tripartite relationship between managers, politicians and citizens is negotiated and managed can help unpick when and how a coproductive process becomes sustainable and effective.

By looking at motivations for people and public officials to coproduce we can start gaining a better understanding of the coproductive relationship. The literature on political participation generally points to socio-economic variables (Sharp, 1980) or networks (Putnam, 1993). One assumption is that participation can be a disbenefit for people, which explains the emphasis on extrinsic rewards (Birchall & Simmons, 2004, p. 27; see also Jakobsen, 2013) also find that 'being asked' is important, and "if they [people] know and trust the person doing the asking they are more likely to participate. People are more likely to be asked if they have wide social networks; networks are therefore another resource".<sup>1</sup>

The motivations of the service providers, local authorities and managers involved in the planning and the delivery of the service – often responding to national-level rhetoric as well as national and local pressures – are also pivotal to understand how the relationship with the citizens develops and is managed (Pestoff, 2014; van Eijk & Steen, 2014). Among the biggest challenges, a failure to develop a shared vision of the goals, set priorities and targets for the expected outputs and outcomes, and communicate this shared vision to actors that may hold very different values can often jeopardise the process at the start (Albrechts, 2013; Beebejaun, Durose, Rees, Richardson, & Richardson, 2015; Richardson, 2013). Moreover, by providing training, incentives and other required resources, government's initiative may prove crucial to enhance involvement in coproduction from those citizens with the greatest need for a given service (Jakobsen, 2013).

Finally, one of the major concerns is that the blurring lines between public authorities, service providers and citizens or the voluntary sector may dilute public accountability (Bovaird, 2007), highlighting how coproduction can certainly not be reduced to managerial instrument but is instead a highly political way of rethinking service provision (Albrechts, 2013). In fact, political leadership is increasingly considered important for the design and the implementation of successful coproduction (Block & Paredis, 2013; Schlappa, 2017).

Overall, the review of the literature on coproduction suggests four main challenges that different styles leadership can help negotiate: setting the priorities of coproduction and clarifying shared goals; guaranteeing greater inclusion, particularly with regard to the weakest sectors of the population; fostering communication and public accountability; and encouraging and supporting innovative practices, by promoting culture change away from bureaucracies' traditional risk-aversion.

### **3.2. Defining leadership types and styles within coproduction**

At the local level, leadership can be seen as a set of different activities performed by actors with different legitimation, rationales and goals (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Within a coproduction process, different types of leadership will come to the fore: managerial/professional

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<sup>1</sup>It should be emphasised that people also respond to moral values, or Alford's (2009) *normative purposes*, while intrinsic rewards (Kohn, 1993; Lane, 1991), or what Wilson (1973) defines 'solidary incentives' and Alford (2009) calls *sociality* are often self-filling.

leadership; civic/community leadership (emerging within an independent voluntary and community sector – i.e. community activists, business leaders, voluntary sector leaders, religious leaders, higher education leaders etc.); and political/representative leadership. These will all play a role and take the lead at various stages in the process, within complex interactions that involve different interests (Hambleton & Howard, 2012).

Building on a consolidated literature on local leadership (Borraz & John, 2004; Gains, Greasley, John, & Stoker, 2009; Greasley & Stoker, 2008; Hambleton, 1998; Huxham & Vangen, 2000; John & Cole, 1999; Kjaer, 2013; Nalbandian, 1999; Svava, 2003, 2008; Teles, 2014), we may highlight a couple of opposite leadership styles for each of these three types.

First, managerial leadership can show a strictly top-down and *hierarchical leadership style*, with local public officials relying on coercion and authority, and emphasising their technical competence vis-à-vis citizens. This style of hierarchical leadership does not appear to be appropriate in more complex and fluid governance settings, where the public sector has no longer the monopoly over service provision and the citizens' needs are increasingly fragmented. Therefore, other leadership styles can prove more effective, such as a more representative bureaucracy (Ricucci, Van Ryzin, & Li, 2016) or integrative public leadership. *Integrative public leadership* can be defined as the leadership necessary to bring diverse groups and organisations together in semi-permanent ways, and typically across sector boundaries, in order to address complex public issues (Anderson & Sun, 2017; Crosby & Bryson, 2010).

Second, different styles of leadership may emerge more or less spontaneously among the citizens involved in the delivery of services. One example is provided by the work of Helen Sullivan on *community leadership* (Sullivan 2007; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2005). Sullivan (2007, p. 159) demonstrates that 'the promotion of single individual "leaders" (such as directly elected mayors) or executive bodies may not be sufficient to help generate local community leadership'. Instead community leadership capacity is shared as co-leadership and distributed throughout organisations (ibid.).

Moreover, civic leaders may prove crucial in building and sustaining another leadership style, which is often present within education and health policy areas: the *shared or distributed leadership* style. Distributed leadership can be defined as the distribution of leadership influence across multiple team members, where members share responsibilities and rely on the skills of one another to enact a range of tasks (Thorpe, Gold, & Lawler, 2011). In particular, distributed leadership is extended beyond a single individual, instead developing through the concerted actions of a network (Currie, Lockett, & Suhomlinova, 2009).

Finally, political leadership at the local level can take on very different forms. Comparative studies in urban governance have identified a continuum of leadership styles ranging from more *individualistic, charismatic and heroic styles of leadership* (Burns, 1978), such as the range of entrepreneurial styles often associated to mayors and the power of economic elites. The city boss, the 'visionary', or even the 'caretaker' (John & Cole, 1999, p. 102) epitomise this style of political leadership. Nonetheless, other leadership styles have been theorised that respond better to the complexities of local governance, such as *facilitative leadership*. Given the challenging social and economic environment, many scholars have proposed that the future role for elected political leaders will be that of a facilitator who promotes positive interaction and a high level of communication among officials in city government



and with the public, also providing guidance in goal setting and policy-making (Bussu, 2015; Svava, 2003).

In coproduction, and participatory processes more generally, leadership can no longer be understood as being primarily political and the role of an individual, as 'a formal leader who either influences or transforms members of a group or organization – the followers – in order to achieve specified goals' (Huxham & Vangen, 2000, p. 1160). This type of leadership would not be able to interpret and aggregate the varied interests and values that come together within a coproduction process. Instead, what might be required is a facilitative leadership, which is emergent, place-based and reliant on different actors who continuously negotiate collective action (Bussu & Bartels, 2014).

The review of empirical cases of coproduction in the next section will examine how leadership might work in practice within these new collaborative processes, *with particular attention to how different forms of leadership contribute to addressing the challenges to coproduction as described in Section 3.1.*

## 4. Review of empirical cases

Initiatives of coproduction in public services at the local level have mushroomed in recent years, particularly in the UK. Several different governmental and non-governmental agencies, think tanks, private organisations, and public ones such as local authorities and health agencies are promoting a variety of initiatives that involve the community, civil servants and politicians 'on the ground'. In order to examine the role of leadership within these processes and identify types and styles, we reviewed the existing literature on coproduction in local government in the UK. We provide a table in the [Appendix](#), detailing the relevant sources for the cases examined.

### 4.1. Methodology

In order to explore the role of leadership within the existing literature on coproduction, we carried out a narrative review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). We used an interpretive approach to synthesis rather than the aggregative approach of the traditional systematic review (Dixon-Woods, McNicol, & Martin, 2012), recurring to iterations with different rounds of selection to ensure a body of texts that was varied but manageable in scope for the review (Vindrola-Padros, Pape, Utley, & Fulop, 2016).

The review started with the selection of two main academic research databases: International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS) and the Web of Science (SSCI). Our searches only included journal articles written in English between 1985 and the 2017. In the first iteration we used the following search terms: 'coproduction' OR 'service coproduction' OR 'coproduction of services' AND 'leadership' OR 'leader' OR 'leaders', gathering more than 2000 references. From this initial set of references, we selected a list of 45 articles by reading the abstracts and looking for cases of coproduction in the UK.

To this initial selection, we added a second round of electronic searches in Web of Science (SSCI): 'coproduction' AND 'local government' (49 records); and 'coproduction' AND 'public service' AND 'local' (37 records). Consistently with our inclusion/ exclusion criteria, out of this second group of references we also selected only articles examining cases of coproduction in the UK.

Since several reports and studies on coproduction are authored by the voluntary sector and government agencies, we also searched for grey literature on Google and Google scholar online database, using the same keywords used in the previous two iterations.

After checking for duplicates, mistakes or omissions in the abstracts, and following more in-depth reading of seemingly relevant articles, we finally included in our analysis 35 references (i.e. journal articles and grey literature reports) of empirical cases of coproduction of local services in the UK.

*We used a Framework approach (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003)<sup>2</sup> and coded the selected articles according to four main categories:* type of service coproduced; types of participants in the process; rationale behind the coproduction process (i.e. motivation to coproduce); and emerging leadership styles. Specifically, the latter were identified by summarising the leadership's activities or traits as described in the empirical papers included in our analysis and by comparing these with the leadership styles identified in the literature (i.e. hierarchical and integrative public leadership for managers; community and distributed leadership for citizens; heroic and facilitative for politicians). Matrices were used to classify, summarise and tabulate data effectively. Although it was not always possible to find a perfect match, we identified in each case the leadership style that most closely approximated the activities and traits described.

After this initial coding, we grouped our empirical cases according to four themes, corresponding to the main challenges to coproduction identified in the literature review (see Section 3.1). The analysis aimed to clarify the contribution of different leadership styles to addressing these challenges, by highlighting four different functions of leadership in coproductive processes: setting the priorities of coproduction and clarifying shared goals; guaranteeing greater inclusion, particularly with regard to the weakest sectors of the population; fostering communication and public accountability; and encouraging and supporting innovative practices.

#### **4.2. Setting priorities and clarifying shared goals**

Managerial and especially political leadership may have a vital role in shaping a shared vision of the outcomes of the collaborative action. Policy-makers are often in a position to bridge across different organisations and share the vision beyond the network of coproducers, in order to avoid fragmentation of initiatives and failures in improved user outcome. The literature reviewed here provided several interesting examples: a coproduction initiative on health policy-making, whereby the government and local authorities had a key role in sponsoring a citizens' jury on health spending prioritisation (Boswell et al. 2015); a process of co-design of an integrated care system to improve the quality of services and support people to maintain their independence, promoted by health and social care leaders in North-West London (Morton & Paice, 2016). The Health Integration Team initiative in Bristol, involving the National Health System, Universities, local authorities, patients and the public, was strengthened by public managers' efforts to recruit patients and carers with experience of strategic work, strong connections in the community, and a commitment to a common vision really paid off (Redwood et al. 2016).

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<sup>2</sup>This method is based on the use of matrices to organise and manage research through the process of summarisation, allowing for analysis of data both by case and theme.



Other studies on local development demonstrate how managers and politicians can act as ‘place managers’ but also ‘place shapers’ as they help (re)construct a sense of identity in the locality (Boland and Coleman 2008). A research on six local partnerships in a number of UK boroughs showed that these partnerships were set up as non-hierarchical structures requiring facilitative leadership (Ford & Green, 2012). Here, democratically elected leaders: provided legitimacy through their ability to foster a common vision and inspire the confidence of all partners engaged; adapted their personal style by cultivating empathy; were able to deliver a shared vision by addressing time constraints, being tenacious implementers and allowing for distribution of power. Similarly, as part of the joint commissioning strategy for older people 2013–2023 in Aberdeen, Scotland, the local council drove effective engagement to develop shared objectives and plans, thus, working to set priorities and try to adopt a more facilitative style that enabled them to overcome managerial practice (Ersoy 2016).

### **4.3. *Guaranteeing greater inclusion and participation of the weakest***

Examples of coproduction differ considerably in terms of the type of participants involved. While most coproduction initiatives tend to develop within highly relational public services such as health and social care or education, out of the cases reviewed here initiatives around regeneration and community projects appeared to be most empowering, with local politicians, supported by local managers and other core stakeholders, siding with users and citizens to pursue collective action.

As representatives of the entire community, elected politicians have to consider a variety of stakes, thus, promoting the inclusion and the participation of the weakest sectors of the community (Parker, Lynn, Wargent, & Locality, 2014; Parker & Street, 2015). Within the ‘Working in Neighbourhoods – WIN’ project, which took place in Bradford between 2009 and 2011 (Richardson, 2012), citizens often expected councillors to resolve preference aggregation issues, by taking the final decision on prioritising alternatives that had emerged during the co-planning phase. Moreover, elected politicians may be active in defence of local minorities and non-majoritarian positions, therefore, brokering diversity issues in their communities (Richardson, 2012). Nonetheless, the role of local policy-makers raises some challenges. In this new direct relationship between citizens/users and officers/providers, politicians no longer are the sole principal. The meaning of the electoral mandate changes slightly and elected representatives can gain from this redistribution of relational power through increased political support (Bussu, 2012, 2015; Richardson, 2012, p. 56).

Local bureaucracies and officers also play a role in enhancing inclusion and representation, when they are able to listen to citizens and take on their views. This was the case in the examples of representative bureaucracy styles in coproduction initiatives, whereby facilitative leadership styles incentivised citizens to coproduce services (Ricucci and van Ryzin 2017) or helped recruit ethnic minorities in local policing (Hong et al. 2016).

Another good example is the Taff Housing project, a housing association with over a 1000 homes in one Cardiff’s most disadvantaged estates. Here, tenants earned credits by volunteering time to help deliver services; they could then spend the credits they earned through a partnership which Taff Housing negotiated with Cardiff’s leisure services, Cardiff Blues Rugby Club and the Gate Community Arts Centre (Boyle and Harris, 2009).

In Birmingham spontaneous community leadership with multiple networks emerged within an urban renewal initiative; community actors acting as boundary spanners helped

bridge the distance between local communities, voluntary organisations and local authorities (van der Pennen and van Bortel 2016).

#### **4.4. Fostering communication and enhancing accountability**

One aspect that often frustrates coproduction initiatives is the lack of effective communication, which can exacerbate issues of a lack of transparency in terms of both financial and democratic accountability. Again, both managerial and political leaders can work together to address this challenge. One example is the collaboration between local managers and elected politicians in the above-mentioned WIN projects (Richardson, 2012). Here, the development of an action learning network of active residents, community and voluntary organisations actively included elected members of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, as well as parish and town councils in the district. The main aim of the project was to develop a neighbourhood plan with the involvement of citizens to co-design and coproduce environmental services and urban regeneration (i.e. the creation of an allotment on a disused patch of land near a primary school). Local government officers provided the required communication activities to bring together administrative and elective branches, thus ensuring information flows and more transparency in budget allocations and knowledge production (Richardson, 2012, p. 12–14, 20).

Within the Neighbourhood Community Budget Programme, launched in 12 pilot neighbourhood areas in 2012 by the Department of Communities and Local Government, residents engaged in service re-design and delivery, with the aim to promote higher quality of life and citizen involvement in the neighbourhood (Rutherford, Spurling, Busby, & Watts, 2013). In Ilfracombe, one of the Neighbourhood Community Budget pilots, town councillors were the drivers behind a new management and delivery model that could guarantee greater democratic accountability and the enhancement of service provider rigour in the spending of public resources. The expected outcome was twofold: on the one hand, the involvement of residents and business aimed at a collaborative approach to service provision, in order to save money while also meeting residents' priorities. On the other hand, coproduction facilitated the development of innovative tools for the management of services and public resources, i.e. the creation of a 'virtual bank' to publicly show the balance of payment of services, or the proposal to involve citizens in delivering activities such as the management of car parks (Rutherford et al., 2013, p. 68).

However, when local policy-makers lack specific community engagement skills, they may contribute to exacerbating the 'gaps in community leadership', by promoting actions without reliance on funding; by providing weak information flows with local officers; and by being unable to arbitrate between competing or conflicting interests within a ward (Richardson, 2012, p. 7, 55, 56).

Leadership can play a contradictory role in power diffusion practices. On the one hand, the creation of a 'leadership' of opinion may be promoted by the better-off members of the community, or by the most influential politicians in town, with the risk of reproducing existing inequalities in accessing resources. On the other hand, when elected politicians help develop a local facilitative leadership, they can play a crucial role in strengthening mechanisms of overview and democratic accountability over private and community-led processes and encourage substantive resource redistribution.

#### **4.5. Encouraging and supporting innovative practices**

When collaborative networks are effective meta-bureaucratic approaches, even where citizens are called to coproduce usual practices persist and knowledge remains in the hands of the professionals, generating much frustration among participants and limiting the potential for innovation (see Fenwick et al. 2012 on local authority partnerships for urban regeneration in England and Scotland).

Particularly where bottom-up innovations are resisted by higher level civil servants who might feel threatened by the influence of external stakeholders over 'their' services, local policy-makers may transform into policy entrepreneurs as they sponsor new ideas and instruments, often coproduced by street-level bureaucrats and civil society.

In 2006, the London Borough of Camden actively supported providers and users of mental health services to introduce coproduction in the commissioning, design and delivery of these services to enhance inclusion (Boyle and Harris 2009, p. 17, 18).

Community empowerment and capacity building were at the core of the Neighbourhood Community Budget initiative in Shard End, Birmingham (Rutherford et al., 2013). The goal of this project was to improve life chances for children, young people and families, through the development of a new youth service model and of a Health and Well-being 'Village' co-designed and co-delivered with young people, partners and local residents. Birmingham city councillors played a pivotal role in driving and steering the project, motivated by the desire to encourage a new vision of development for their community and to deliver more effective and efficient services in the area.

In the analysis of 120 cases of spatial planning in the Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP) supported by the Localism Act (2011), local authorities proved to be important partners holding knowledge, resources and power to shape the implementation of the plans. Moreover, local government provided the appropriate spaces and resources to encourage new knowledge, also by sustaining existing skills within the community, who shaped the visions and outcome of the projects (Parker, Lynn, & Wargent, 2015; Parker et al., 2014).

### **5. Discussion: Leadership beyond leaders**

The review of the empirical cases of coproduction in local government emphasised a multifaceted role of local leadership, with multiple types of leaders intervening in the process and very different leadership styles. First, the empirical cases suggest leadership emerges as a complex and collective activity, rather than the actions or choices of individual leaders. Managers, politicians and community leaders may contribute (positively or negatively) to coproduction. In this sense, concepts of public integrative leadership and distributed leadership all seem very promising in pushing forward research on coproduction.

The attitudes of councillors, officers, managers and community organisers inevitably play a pivotal role in encouraging or disincentivising participation, through their interaction with service users and citizens. Indeed, local actors may play a crucial role in bridging across coproducers' different values and interests and building trust in politics and bureaucracies on the one hand, and citizenship on the other (Fledderus, Brandsen, & Honingh, 2014).

Second, leadership can perform very different activities, such as the promotion of innovation by facilitating citizen involvement and securing resources and support for experimental practices; the enhancement of collaboration by creating a shared space for all the

participants; the facilitation of communication and information flows among different coproducers to help develop a common language; the mediation between traditional institutions and street-level working practices.

Third, and most importantly, facilitative leadership seems the most appropriate leadership style to solve problems of priorities, inequality of participation, scarcity of resources and weak accountability in the coproduction process. A facilitative leadership can enhance the participation of weaker stakeholders and support their involvement by providing the necessary time and resources to voice their expectations and acquire the skills they need to co-deliver these (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Ford & Green, 2012).

Within new collaborative arrangements, leadership needs a capacity to coordinate and organise different interests and foster mutual trust within coherent and committed partnerships. It has to be able to motivate and aggregate such different interests over time, as well as guaranteeing continuity between the initial phase (co-design) and the operational phase (coproduce) by ensuring all actors are clear about their responsibilities.

The most innovative approaches to service delivery will often emerge from the collaboration between different types of leadership, as each will understand different aspects of the context and the people involved and have the ability to *sponsor* (political leadership) and *champion* (managerial leadership) the process, enhancing its *inclusiveness* (community-based leadership). The facilitative leadership that emerges can play a pivotal role in supporting more equal collaborative dynamics in the absence of a neutral shared space for coproduction.

Within a collaborative context, political institutions, far from being nullified, are expected to play a different role in stimulating 'multilateral exchanges, which will produce norms of behaviour and reciprocity' (Pinson, 2002, p. 14). Politics still matter but, as demonstrated by the cases reviewed here, it is no longer about the interventionist institutional actor which imposes top-down policies in a rigid fashion, rather leadership emerges through flexible practice that facilitates public discussion over policies and produce democratisation (Pinson, 2002, 2005; Piselli, 2005). This new approach to leadership may bring about a 'recombination' of modes of local regulation, which leaves more room for self-organisational dynamics (Pinson, 2005). Political leaders can capitalise on their visibility and legitimacy to drive innovative processes of coproduction, which will entail a high level of experimentation and risk-taking. Coproduction will, therefore, require the reframing of the relationship between professionals as problem-solvers and users into one based on values of collaborations and respect, as information and decision-making are shared (Hambleton & Howard, 2012).

The cases examined here reveal how a lack of community engagement skills and the traditional risk-aversion of bureaucracies represent a crucial hinder to developments in coproductive practice (Richardson, 2012). Institutional arenas tend to be dominated by models of top-down management that promise to guarantee safety and accountability; this inevitably clashes with the emphasis on (risky) experimentation required within coproduction settings. Frontline workers, in order to drive collaboration, will require greater discretion and a high degree of flexibility, while senior-level leadership will have to learn to let go of control to some degree (Hambleton & Howard, 2012).

The role of politicians as sponsors (which entails acting not only as policy entrepreneurs but as actual 'guides' in the policy process) can encourage innovation by stimulating connectivity between staff and other stakeholders (beyond traditional partnerships on an institution-to-institution basis); by protecting the collaborative space from political and

financial pressure, as in the cases of the Neighbourhood Community Budgets; and by taking responsibility for risks in order to shield frontline staff from fear of failure and manage their resistance to change. The new arenas of coproduction will be infused with value differences and conflicts, therefore, leadership necessarily becomes multi-level, and senior figures can play a facilitative role and orchestrate a process of social discovery (Hambleton & Howard, 2012).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper tried to develop a clearer understanding of coproduction and the challenges these collaborative processes inevitably raise, in terms of developing a shared vision that can bridge across very different interests; fostering an inclusive process where the weakest sectors of the population can have substantive influence; guaranteeing democratic and financial accountability; and enabling traditionally risk-averse institutions to support innovative practice. We looked at the role of leadership in addressing these challenges and identified the types and styles that appear to be most conducive to coproduction processes. We carried out a narrative review of the empirical literature on coproduction initiatives in the UK. This approach certainly bears several limitations, particularly since the analysis relied on existing reports and as such we did not have the opportunity to examine cases according to our theoretical lenses. Furthermore, many of the cases reviewed were grey literature and part of evaluation reports, with limited focus on leadership, at times lacking some theoretical rigour.

Nevertheless, we were able to identify different roles of coproducers and the literature on facilitative leadership offered the most appropriate theoretical lens for understanding leadership within these collaborative settings. The focus here is not simply on facilitative leaders as one or two key individuals that govern the process and act as catalysts of change, but on leadership as a 'collective enterprise' involving several people with different roles at different times (Bryson, 2004). Therefore, relational dynamics rather than organisational structures appear as the key variable of leadership within coproductive practice.

Future research and analysis that links concepts of leadership and coproduction will need to reflect on power dynamics (including gender – see Fletcher & Käufer, 2003) and team structures, as facilitative leadership does not necessarily translate into distributed power (Schlappa, 2017).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** List of empirical cases on coproduction in local government in the UK.

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**Table A2.** Review of empirical cases of coproduction.

Reference	Name of the case	Type of service	Policy phase	Coproducers and participants	Motivations for coproduction	Emerging style of leadership
Albrechts 2013	Review of different cases of strategic spatial planning in the UK	Spatial planning	Planning and design of integrated services	Planners, local authorities, citizens, local public officers	Ameliorate the quality of life and build trust in the community through the coproduction of planning initiatives	Planners have to develop the capacities to deal with political issues and face conflict with public officials
Baker-LARCI 2010	Peer support groups Gateshead, Mansfield	Involvement in groups	Delivery of professionally defined services	Professionals, patients, new mothers or young offenders, and their families	Ameliorate the quality of services	Integrative leadership involving professional, local officers and users, professionals facilitate the raise of awareness and confidence
Baker-LARCI 2010	Time banks London and Nottingham	Health care	Delivery	Voluntary members of the time bank	Boost confidence and broaden the social network of participants	–
Boland and Coleman 2008	Communicative action for local planning in the London Borough of Barnet	Mixed neighbourhood services	Planning	Citizens, local officers, town councillors	Build trust and sense of community	Elected representative should show a facilitative style of leadership to support the initiatives
Boswell et al. 2015	Health policy-making	Institution of a government-commissioning jury	Design and delivery	NHS, providers, local authorities, users	Promoting coproduction on health spending prioritization	–
Bovaird 2007	Beacon Community Regeneration Partnership	Health and energy services	Planning and delivery	Health services, community leaders, local councillors	Promote quality of health services and energy efficiency	Facilitative leadership emerges from the catalysing role of the council
Boyle and Harris 2009	Coproduction cases in UK, e.g. Mental day care services in Camden, London	Commissioning of mental health day care services	Design	Local health professionals, local authorities, users, town councillors, NEF and NESTA planners	Coproduction favouring dialogue between providers and users	Facilitative leadership: councillors support the introduction of innovation

Boyle, Slay, Stephens –NEF and NESTA 2010	Learning to Lead Blue schools, state secondary school, Wells, Somerset	Creating a forum for young people and their families	Planning of individual education	Students, link teachers and staff	Intensify what young students are passionate about	No role for politicians or public managers; students contribute to actively built their education
Boyle, Slay, Stephens –NEF and NESTA 2010	Gloucester Enablement Lead Programme, South-West England	Social service team for disabled children	Delivery	Children, families, professionals	Move away from the traditional model of social service delivery	Development of community leadership
Boyle, Slay, Stephens –NEF and NESTA 2010	Sallywags, East London	Parents run nursery	Delivery	Parents and paid staff	Motivating parents to 'own' the childcare service, economic incentives to coproduce	Parents engage in management decisions too
Boyle, Slay, Stephens –NEF and NESTA 2010	Taff Housing Cardiff	Housing association in disadvantaged housing estates	Delivery of professionally designed services	Managers, social enterprise, female tenants	Challenge the dependency culture	Facilitative leadership: boosting tenants capacity and confidence
Boyle, Slay, Stephens –NEF and NESTA 2010	Chard Community Justice Panel Somerset	A local justice panel	Delivery	Professionals, local people	Making people more responsible for minor offences	Residents should play a role on justice within community
Ersoy 2016	Coproduction strategy in Aberdeen, Scotland	Joint commissioning and strategy for older people		Local authorities, citizens, local civil officers, providers, service users	Control of the costs, promotion of citizens engagements, focus from management to democratic empowerment	Lack of facilitative leadership: councillors should be more effect in engage and lead the emergence of shared objective and plans, and in the setting of priorities
Fenwick 2012	Local Authority Partnerships in England and Scotland	Local development	Planning	Local authorities, local stakeholders, local officers	Promote development	Lack of leadership, partnerships as meta-bureaucratic events
Ford and Green 2012	Local Strategic partnerships in core city boroughs		Planning	Citizens, city boroughs, shire councils, local stakeholders	Fostering a non-hierarchical structure of interaction	Facilitative leadership to a shared vision

(Continued)





Table A2. (Continued).

Reference	Name of the case	Type of service	Policy phase	Coproducers and participants	Motivations for coproduction	Emerging style of leadership
Morton and Paice 2016	Integrated care in North-West London	Health and social care	Design and delivery	Health and social care leaders, users, local authorities	Improve the quality of care and support people to maintain independence	Integrated and facilitative leadership: experience of strategic work, commitment to the vision, providing material support to the initiatives
Murray and Greer 1998	Community-led rural development in Northern Ireland	Community development and strategic planning	Planning and delivery	Planners, community leaders, local authorities	Promote community group formation and foster strategic planning	Community leadership, local authorities forging new partnership arrangements
Parker et al. 2015	Neighbourhood planning initiatives, 120 cases in England	Spatial planning in Neighbourhood Development Plans	Planning	Community activists, local authorities and councillors, planning consultants	Ameliorate the quality of services in the Neighbourhood; create a sense of community	Community leadership; town councillors promoting and supporting the plans with resources and spaces
Redwood et al. 2016	The Health Integration Team (HIT) in Bristol	Integrated health care pathways	Planning and delivery	NHS, universities, local authorities, patients	Avoid the risks of the lack of leadership,	Promote distributed and coordinated leadership: NHS and council leaders enhance coordination among organisations
Richardson 2012	Working in Neighbourhoods (WIN)	Environmental services, police, health, youth services	Co-design and co-delivery	Residents, community and voluntary organisations, elected politicians of the metropolitan district council, public sector professionals, council officers	Crucial role of local councillors, but variable skills that made harder to achieve effective community leadership	Lack of leadership: councillors could not secure funding; poor information flows btw officers and councillors, underdeveloped roles in arbitrating between conflicting interests
Richardson 2013	Coproduction in scientific research	Promotion of participatory approaches to policy evaluation	Planning	Researchers, local policy-makers	Promote the use of social science in policy-making	Involvement of both researchers and politicians in the evaluation of research

Rutherford, Spurling, Busby, Watts 2013	Neighbourhood community budget programme – Ilfracombe	Mixed neighbourhood services	Co-design and co-delivery	Residents, civil servants form DCLG, local authorities	Engaging communities and gain local and community control over budgets	Facilitative leadership of town councillors sponsoring the initiative
Rutherford, Spurling, Busby, Watts 2013	Neighbourhood community budget programme – Shard End	Social care in neighbourhood services	Co-design and co-delivery	Residents, civil servants form DCLG, local authorities	Councillors recognized the persistence of poor service quality and outcomes	Facilitative leadership of town councillors recognising poor service quality, building pride and trust
Van der Pennen and van Bortel 2016	Neighbourhood renewal in the Netherlands and in Birmingham	Housing and regeneration	Design and delivery	Government agencies, local authorities and councillors, residents, third sector	Create a sense of community and enhance a dialogue with public agencies	Community leadership creating links with local authority officers and third service and housing associations