Leading service co-production:

Preliminary findings from a study of the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings from the first stage of a study that explores the co-production of fire prevention services in the United Kingdom. We took a qualitative case study approach and applied a conceptual framework developed in an earlier paper (Schlappa and Imani, 2013) to structure the collection and analysis of data. Our framework is based on relational leadership theory and draws on concepts of motivation, structure and power to examine the interactions between professional and citizen co-producers of services. The analysis revealed a number of novel insights into the co-production of preventative emergency services involving volunteers. In applying our findings to the analytical framework on different types of co-production (Brandsen and Honingh, 2015) we were able to show that the delivery of standard core services can evolve into the volunteer led design and delivery of bespoke complementary services. Our preliminary findings raise a number of theoretical and conceptual issues, including questions about the ambiguous role of volunteers as regular and citizen co-producers of services.

1. Introduction

The notion of leadership, together with associated issues of control and power, occupy a central place in the broader discourse on public service provision. Yet, little scholarly attention has been paid to the process of leading in co-production (Schlappa and Imani, 2012, 2013). This paper is based on the first part of a larger study of a voluntary scheme in Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue services (HFRS) and applies the conceptual framework we developed (Schlappa and Imani, Forthcoming) by combining insights from the critical relational leadership (Hosking et al., 2012, Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012) and complexity sciences theories (Stacey, 2001, Stacey and Mowles, 2015). Building on the typology of different types of co-production (Brandsen and Honingh, 2015) we argue that leadership might express itself differently depending the type of co-production actors are engaged in. In this paper we apply our conceptual framework to a study of co-production of fire prevention services to examine how the exploration of leadership could provide new insights into the co-production process. Our initial findings shed light on key dimensions of the co-production process, namely motivations, structure and relational power dynamics within a public service that has a strongly hierarchical structure and a deeply rooted control and command culture. We conclude by arguing that

concepts of critical relational leadership offer a valuable suitable framework for the exploration of co-production processes which can be applied to core as well as complementary services.

2. Conceptual framework

Conceptualization of leadership as a relational and facilitative process (Hosking, 2007) allows us to explain what happens when service providers and citizens come together to co-produce a service (Schlappa and Imani, Forthcoming). The concept of *critical relational leadership* (Uhl-Bien, 2006, Hosking et al., 2012, Shamir, 2012, Ospina et al., 2012), which draws on the distributed leadership literature (Gronn, 2009, Bolden, 2011, Brown and Hosking, 1986), provides the main concepts for exploring central issues of collaboration such as motivations, structure and power. This approach adopts a social constructionist approach (Van Der Haar and Hosking, 2004), with the *relational* dimension focusing on interactions in which multiple realties are co-constructed, while the *critical* aspect regards power as relational, contested and inherently emergent (Hosking, 2007). Power is also seen as paradoxical as it is both enabling and constraining at the same time (Van Der Haar and Hosking, 2004, Stacey, 2007, Hosking, 2008). The potential fluidity of power enables an individual to influence, or make, decisions but at the same time power is constrained by other individuals' power, resources, rules, knowledge and expertise and many other factors. In the context of leading educational services, Woods (forthcoming) identifies different types of power as *top-down*, *emerging through interactions*, and *co-operative*. Our framework's conceptualisation of power points to the relational aspect of these different types of power.

We further expand the concept of emergent relational power by drawing on insights from complexity sciences (Stacey and Mowles, 2015), which in turn is influenced by Elias (1991) who regarded power as an inseparable aspect of human relations arising from their needs and interdependencies, and not an object possessed by an individual. In co-production, powerful individuals, policy, institutional contexts, service standards and requirements could also influence power relations. This is close to Bovaird's (2007) argument that professionals, users, communities and politicians create multi-purpose, multi-level and multi-agency relationships.

Bovaird and Loeffler (2012, p.36) argue that *'…equal and reciprocal relationships are conditions that have rarely been encountered in the sphere of public services'.* Our approach assumes that co-producers may not necessarily be equal, but each party could potentially steer the process towards outcomes that reflect their values, interests and ideals or their interpretations of the rules. Our framework also accommodates different types of co-production and builds on the analytical framework developed by Brandsen and Honingh (2015) shown in Table 1. We suggest that this typology tends to undervalue the dynamic

nature of co-production and that these different types could also be different phases of co-production of a service, but it provides an important analytical framework to guide the structured exploration of the co-production process.

Table 1: Co-production typologies

	Implementation	Design and implementation
Complementary	Complementary co-production in implementation	Complementary co-production in service design and implementation
Non-complementary	Co-production in the implementation of core services	Co-production in the design and implementation of core services

Source: (Brandsen and Honingh, 2015)

Our conceptual framework that guided the exploration of co-production in the HFRS is based on the premise that leading in co-production is characterised by three dimensions, each having distinctive features, namely:

- *Motivations-* leading co-production involves a better understanding of different motivations and goals of co-producers and the revealing and managing of tensions.

- *Structure-* co-productions need to operate in a structure with minimum restrictions and rules which constrain discussion and actions between co-producers. Agencies which aim to engage citizens in co-production need to create a space that is 'lightly structured' (Hosking et al., 2012) to mitigate against institutional contexts dominating the co-production process (Van Eijk and Steen, 2014, Tortzen, 2015). Hosking's notion of *light structure* is rather idealistic and certainly indeterminate but still useful, as structure is context-specific, and in practice potential co-producers could encounter insurmountable restrictions such as regulations, professional codes of conduct, accountability and responsibility of officials.

- *Power dynamics- Leading co-production is based on understanding and accepting that power is relational and negotiated between co-producers.* This shifts assumptions about the co-producer relationship from one where the official 'is in the lead' to where expressions of power are negotiated, i.e., from the 'power over' to 'power to' (Hosking, 2004). Enabling institutional structures include sharing leadership roles, facilitating collaborative working across boundaries and hierarchies, and encouraging innovation and change (Woods and Woods, 2013).

The key dimensions and features of our framework are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2- Dimensions and Features of Leading in Co-production

Key dimensions	Distinctive features of co-production
Motivations	**Dealing with different motivations, values, ideals of officials and citizen co-producers may involve:** • Exploring and resolving tensions that may exist amongst officials and between officials and citizen co-producers • Encouraging open dialogue • Agreeing on shared goals and how to achieve them
Structure	**Attributes of a light structure that facilitates flexible collaborative working relationships and learning may include:** • Rules are reduced to a minimum • Leadership to be distributed across roles, functions and hierarchies • To harness diverse capabilities of citizens and officials
Power	**Power is dynamic, relational, contested, negotiated and could be observed by exploring:** • Different types of power attributed to officials and citizen co-producers • How decisions are legitimised through participation, dialogue and consent

3. Study context

3.1 Policy context for fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom

The UK fire and rescue services have become a victim of their own success in achieving their core organizational goals, namely reducing fires. Between 2010 and 2015 fire and rescue services in England had to deal average budget reductions of 28% (National Audit Office, 2014). During this period spending on statutory duties, such as responding to fires, road traffic accidents and other emergencies remained largely the same, while spending on preventative measures fell by 47.1% in real terms. In 2013, the review of English Fire and Rescue Authorities concluded that unlike almost any other public service, fire and rescue achieved a 'massive 50% reduction in emergency incidents in the last decade… but no similar change in the make up or cost of the service' (Knight, 2013, p, 4). The report argued that fire and rescue agencies needed to transform themselves to reflect different risks and demands and this offered scope for further savings.

In November 2015, the UK government announced that the budgets for fire and rescue services will have their budgets reduced by an additional 29% between 2016 and 2020 (Johnstone, 2016). At around the same time the government announced that the administrative responsibility for fire and rescue services would move to the Home Office which has been asked to set out how it can improve performance in a context of ongoing funding

reductions for fire and rescue authorities (Home Office and DCLG, 2016, Home Office, 2016b, Home Office, 2016a). The driver for these changes is a vision of a fire service that is more closely integrated with other emergency services, such as ambulance and police as well as health and social care services. Many fire service led preventative services already include falls prevention, heating and home security checks of vulnerable people with reported benefits including service improvements through better integration and cost savings.

3.2 The HFRS volunteers scheme

Recognized as one of the most successful volunteer schemes in the UK, the HFRS initiative was launched in January 2008 and currently has around 150 volunteers (hertsdirect.org). Like other fire and rescue service in the UK, the HFRS tends to be dominated by white male professionals. In contrast, the diverse profile of the volunteers in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, education and background often better reflects the makeup of the communities that fire services serve. The volunteers are a 'fully uniformed arm' of the service and dedicate at least 6 hours of their time each month. They help HRFS to engage with citizens including groups with whom the service had struggled to engage before (ibid.). All volunteers are fully trained in fire safety awareness and first aid but some receive specialist training for in resilience and also trading standards'. They deliver a wide range of *preventative* services which makes a considerable contribution to reducing the number of preventable deaths and injuries. The service they deliver include home fire safety checks, arson patrols, community horse patrols, bicycle patrols, attending school fairs, trading standards, and other specialized services (ibid.).

4. Methodology

This qualitative study adopts a social constructionist position which is congruent with our conceptual framework. Our study had three aims:
- To explore the process of co-producing fire prevention services by the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Community Volunteer Scheme
- To apply the concept of relational leadership (Schlappa and Imani, Forthcoming)
- To relate our findings to the analytical framework of co-production developed by Brandsen and Honingh (2015).

We collected our data by means of documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Documentary analysis included a review of annual reports of the volunteer scheme, the management development and action plan for the HFRS Community Volunteer

Scheme as well as an internal evaluation that formed part of a postgraduate dissertation project undertaken by the initiator of the volunteer scheme.

The primary data for the first part of this study was collected through two in-depth face-to-face interviews with the current manager of the volunteer scheme and the senior commander who initiated and until recently had overall responsibility for the scheme. In addition we undertook two focus groups with volunteers, which had between 6 and 7 participants. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Both researchers analysed the data using a qualitative approach of open coding which draws out the main themes and patterns contained in the data. To assist this process we employed electronic data analysis software NVivo. We are presenting the findings anonymously, but we are making distinctions between paid staff and volunteers. The findings presented here are based on the first stage of data collection; a further stage will include interviewing senior management staff and focus groups of front-line fire fighters to deepen our understanding of the dynamics and relational aspect of co-production processes in fire and rescue services.

5. Findings

The findings are respectively structured around the three key dimensions of our framework: motivations, and structure and power. We present our findings on motivations for both HFRS staff and volunteers.

5.1. Motivations

The volunteer scheme was launched in 2008 in response to the then Labour government's promotion of volunteering. One of the key government policy planks was social inclusion and capacity building of both voluntary and public service organizations to bring about a better collaboration between different societal actors. It seems as though HFRS wanted to be seen to be doing 'the right thing' by establishing a volunteer scheme:

> *It wasn't as though we didn't have enough existing capacity...It was more about volunteering as a bigger government supported issue. …. It just seemed like others were doing it. Not fire and rescue services, but other organisations, other public bodies were getting involved in volunteer schemes.* (Manager B)

> *..to get a far more representative group of people involved with the fire service so that they were more aligned to our communities than our current establishment strength, because at the time, and it probably still is now, it's very white male dominated, the fire service.* (Manager A)

Since then the policy and funding context for fire and rescue services has changed significantly. Prolonged budgetary austerity unprecedented in post-war times has dramatically reduced the funds available to HFRS and other public agencies. At the time of data collection,

the contributions made by volunteers could no longer be described as marginal, of entirely complementary to core services provided by paid staff. At the most senior levels the volunteer scheme remained a 'nice to have' initiative which helped HFRS to do work beyond the core statutory duties with little financial input. Closer to front line there was a recognition that volunteers were now an essential part of the service mix:

> *The organisation is now facing some really big funding issues, which is changing the thinking around volunteering. ….I think from a delivery perspective... the volunteers are integral and key to that side of the business.* (Manager B)

> *I mean, we didn't get into the complexity of the work, because they do everything now, volunteers are involved in every aspect of community safety work now. Anything the fire service does, we've got volunteers involved with … if we stopped having volunteers tomorrow they would realise that it is not a complementary service, it is a heavily relied upon core service now.* (Manager A)

Despite the growing importance volunteers seem to play, their role was perceived as being primarily concerned with delivering a service that was designed and specified by paid staff. While involving volunteers in service design did not seem to be something that was feasible, they were expected 'to organize themselves', which meant planning the delivery of the services:

> *Now, when you say planning a service, if you're talking about a bottom-up design of something we've delivered to members of the public, at this point in time we've not used volunteers for that.* (Manager A)

> *…and we'll say 'this is what we want or what we need doing, these are the needs and objectives of your district, can you organise people to meet?' And they generally are left to get on and do their own organisation.* (Manager A)

All volunteers spoke about wanting 'to make a difference and give back to the society'. But they had different secondary motivations, mainly related to their personal capabilities and employment status. Retired volunteers felt they were still fit, healthy, capable and having a lot to offer and make a difference, while younger volunteers were simply interested in working with the fire service, tried to develop their career in public services generally or were between jobs, benefiting from the training and the experience the HFRS volunteer scheme offered.

As for the expectations, all were surprised by the scale and scope of the issues they came across, even retired fire fighters reported that volunteering created an entirely different perspective on the service:

> *It has really opened my eyes…seeing some of the sights that I have seen, you come out of there and you're choked. (FG2)*

> *. …as you're out there you then become an individual, no matter what you're doing, whether it's arson patrol or whatever, your knowledge and your sensibility tell you*

there's something else here. So you address that issue as well. Yes, you can send it back. I send things back and I have to rely on senior staff taking up those actions. Sometimes I get replies, sometimes I don't. We do use our initiative; you've got to. (FG1)

The demands and nature of the volunteering role seems to result in the retention of some volunteers, while others are overwhelmed and leave early.

5.2. Structure:

Our conceptual framework is based on the notion that relational leadership and structure are inter-related and that a 'light structure' is essential to facilitate co-production processes. Our findings suggest that the volunteer scheme was barely integrated into the mainstream statutory and non-statutory work of paid staff. Hence the strongly hierarchical control and command culture remained unaffected by the volunteer scheme. Conversely, the volunteer scheme, although on the surface seemed similar to that of the mainstream service, was quite different and reflected more closely ideas of a 'light structure'. Where there is overlap between the VS and mainstream work, volunteers reported on 'tensions' because regular fire fighters seemed concerned about volunteers threatening their job security:

If you're talking about the paid staff within the fire service and the volunteers, you've got to be honest about this, to begin with, and I still think there is a lot in it, they think that we're out to take their jobs. (FG1)

Both, volunteers and paid staff perceived organizational structure as rigid and hierarchical, with paid staff being seen to have the power and responsibility to define and ensure the adherence to rules. The nature of an emergency service was given as the main reason for the need to follow line reporting protocol and observing the strictly-defined service delivery processes. Although the establishment of the scheme offered the opportunity to create a less hierarchical and 'lighter structure', both paid staff and volunteers seemed to prefer the traditional control and command approach:

I think lots of people are attracted to the culture. It is hierarchical, we give them a uniform. (Manager B)

There is a chain of command, even though we are volunteers you do have managers... so you have a chain of command to go through, you can't just do it off your own bat. (FG 1)

There is a standard laid down that you have to adhere to. We're all wearing a badge of authority, we're all wearing a uniform; we are representing a recognised body so you have to have - you've got to go out smart. … You've got a standard to stick to. (FG1)

Wearing a uniform was perceived as a privilege by volunteers but this seemed to come with an obligation to behave like regular fire fighters. Although wearing a fire service uniform was important for the delivery of the fire prevention services to citizens, looking like a fire fighter did not make regular paid staff accept them as 'equals'. Their contribution was seen to be of a kind where regular fire fighters would design the service and volunteers 'help us deliver'. Involvement in service design and planning was not seen as necessary or relevant and some volunteers felt intimidated by regular fire fighters:

> *The fire fighters actually wanted the volunteers to be like fire fighters, they didn't like the diversity, particularly the unconscious bias, I sensed it. It's okay, if you were like us and one of the boys and girls, great. If you're a little bit different.* (Manager B)

> *In x fire station, I went in and the fireman said: what exactly do you do and what are you here for? And I didn't know how to answer, because I was quite shocked that he said that to me. Also, I think they look at someone as old as me and think 'what on earth are you doing? What can you do, you can't sling someone over your shoulder and carry them down the stairs.* (FG1)

Paid staff reported on having to manage tensions arising from volunteers being 'different' to regular fire fighters. These differences, rooted in their contrasting professional and education backgrounds, had to be protected and nurtured because they underpinned volunteer motivation to 'do good' and providing meaningful engagement with their community. Apart from the challenge of bridging the gap between values and approaches of paid workers and volunteers, the paid scheme managers faced the dilemma of wanting to empower volunteers to 'be themselves' while at the same time having to put mechanism in place which would control their behaviour. There was also a recognition on both sides that a better integration of the scheme with the mainstream service would reduce tensions. However, this could change the nature of the service. Not only would the management of volunteers have to change from a laissez-faire approach a much more regulated and controlled one, such a development would also increase the potential threat to paid staff, thus increasing 'passive obstruction' and putting up more barriers to integration:

> *I actually think the volunteers could almost be commissioned to do specific pieces of work, whole pieces of work, rather than just dabbling and adding value to what else is going on. For example, they could take over almost all of the home visits. They could just say, I'll tell you what, the fire fighters, there will be less of you; you focus on training and response and the community volunteers will deliver home visits.* (Manager B)

> *Volunteers could be used for a serious purpose but we'd have to reformat what we're about and there would have to be job descriptions, you'd have to turn up on time, you'd have to change the whole nature of volunteering.* (FG2)

> *There could be some sort of political issues, because the more work we take from them, the less they can justify their existence… So we could be seen as a threat.* (FG2)

We found contradictions in the way paid staff perceived the level of integration between the scheme and core fire and rescue services. On one hand, paid staff referred to the co-production scheme as becoming part of the 'core services' provided by the organisation. On the other hand, the outputs generated by volunteers were not officially contributing to the achievement of organisation's KPIs. For example, the volunteer scheme delivered 7000 home fire safety visits last year, but the target for regular fire fighters to undertake their own 4,000 fire safety visits was not affected by this. There was also very limited contact between volunteers and regular fire fighters, and hardly any feedback on their service, leading to a feeling that their services were not really being valued by the organisation. Neither was the qualitative impact resulting from the extensive interactions between volunteers and citizens captured methodically or if it did, the volunteers did not receive any individual feedback on this. This resulted in an impoverished reporting of outputs and outcomes to senior management and to the volunteers:

> *The other point, we go, we do our fire visits, we hand the forms back, but there's no sense that we've been supervised, nobody checks the quality of the visits. … There's no management of what we do or checking of standard or checking of quality.* (FG2)

> *Although, as we say, we live in peace and harmony with the fire service, I have absolutely no idea what they think of us, that might be a good thing, because they haven't told us, or there are no events that force us to sit down together and discuss and plan…I think we give ourselves our own feedback.* (FG2)

> *I know we're contributing to KPIs and things, but even the work on home fire safety visits, the target that the crews were given has never been relaxed; they still have to do the same that they did when we started.* (Manager A)

Our findings suggest that there is a perception among paid staff and volunteers that the volunteer-led service process is controlled through established fire service protocols, rules and structures, while in practice volunteers make far reaching decisions in the actual co-production processes, once what is perceived to be the 'core part of the service' has been delivered. This implies a less rigid and 'lighter structure' in the part of the service process that is led by volunteers without contributions from paid staff:

> *You go in to do one thing and then notice many others and you can report those back to different services, but what I've found is that you're giving something that you want to do, it's something personal. … But when I go in there, I might be going in there to fit some equipment and look at her property and make assessments and recommend certain things and give information, and even fit the equipment, but it will go beyond*

that because I'll be there thinking what relatives come to see her? Does she have carers in? How long is she on her own? (FG1)

It's not part of the job but you find that you become like a social worker now, you're not part of it but you have come into it. (FG1)

You seem not to just be one person but you seem to be five or six people going in; you're one person with five or six different hats on, going into that property and picking up so many different things. (FG1)

Some volunteers described their work as 'operating in a bubble' (FG2), which reflects not only the lack of integration with the mainstream service, but also the inherent tension between a light structure that facilitates the sharing of leadership roles between service provider and service user, and a hierarchical structure where the service provider retains control over the design and delivery of the service. Our findings suggest that for the hierarchical part of the structure, the volunteer scheme delivers an important element of a core service, but for the 'light structured' part of the service volunteers take the lead and extend the nature of the service significantly. This may in part explain the very high satisfaction rates among service users/co-producers:

I don't find that we have much contact with the... my experience is, we don't really have much contact with the crew. It seems to me that we live in a kind of bubble that's separate to the real fire people, as it were. (FG2)

We can do it on our own, we don't get complaints about it, everybody is pleased with what we do, but to a certain extent, it's not serious. …. Everything we do is good, everything is fantastic, no complaints, but if we started doing serious stuff then you'd have to reformat it. (FG2)

And we've done quality assurance, what percentage on the quality assurance feedback do you think we got, from 0% to 100%? It's been 100% for volunteers; it's not the case for...fire fighters. (Manager A)

5.3. Power

Given the command and control nature of the fire and rescue service, it was not surprising that both managers said that volunteers are given a list of jobs that needs to be carried out and they do it. At first glance, this is similar to a top-down power (Woods, forthcoming), except that being volunteers they could also refuse to work. When we asked the volunteers who was in charge, they all named the scheme manager as being 'at the center of the web' (FG1 & FG2).

They're trained how to identify risk and they're also trained in what advice to give people… It's not quite like paid staff. We don't have the same checks and balances but we do try to make sure that people are equipped to do the role that we're asking them to do. (Manager A)

Yet, in practice the scheme manager could only exercise some positional power over the paid staff not over the volunteers, who chose whether to carry out a task or not. In this light, the volunteers have 'power to' to take on a task and if they deem necessary and change the complementary aspect of the co-produced service. For fire safety visits, volunteers perform a standard procedure called a fire safety check and may install a fire alarm. Here they are delivering a core service. But frequently they come across problems they believe need to be addressed such as isolation, health or safety issues that need to be addressed because they often relate to vulnerable individuals.

> *You could see he was damaged, so you just can't find word to explain it. You are just dealing with it, the elderly, you are dealing with a whole raft, right the way through.*
>
> *I think we have a different concept of what a fire safety visit is, to the professionals. So, for example, to us, we have a sort of spirit of endless time, where I think they're probably time constrained.* (FG2)

It is in these unpredictable situations that the volunteers take 'control' using their own judgments. They put it down to just 'making a difference' and the draining but rewarding aspect of their volunteering work and ignoring the power shift between them and the paid staff, who were seen to be in control. Yet this was the unpredictable, uncategorized dimension of a pre-designed service that enabled volunteers to lead a particular part of the service process.

6. Discussion

The critical relational leadership framework has allowed to explore the process of leading in co-production of preventative services in HFRS, focusing on co-producers' different motivations, the structure in which the co-production was organized and delivered, and the relational power dynamics amongst co-producers. We were also able to relate our findings to different types of co-production, distinguishing between core and complementary services. Below we discuss our findings in relation to the three dimensions of our conceptual framework before linking them to the analytical framework developed by Brandsen and Honingh (2015).

6.1. Motivations

Regular and volunteer co-producers seemed to work harmoniously together to deliver fire prevention services. On the face of it both parties aimed to deliver a HFRS service, recognized for its importance and also standard of delivery. As such this was the delivery of a core service, designed and pre-planned by regular producers in the mainstream HFRS structure, but delivered through a largely separate volunteer scheme. Yet, at the same time volunteers had additional, perhaps largely intrinsic motivations, to respond to problems they encountered

during the delivery of the regular service. They did not seem to encounter any barriers to creating additional service interventions, perhaps in part because they operated 'in a bubble' outside the mainstream structure of HFRS. This would imply that HFRS was not responsible for these 'complementary' services and that following up referrals or suggested actions put forward by volunteers was optional.

However, our findings also alluded to tensions arising from paid staffs' perceptions of the volunteer scheme's role in potential changes to their paid roles and possible redundancies due to volunteers taking over functions previously undertaken by them. Apart from withdrawing co-operation there were also incidents of 'passive obstruction' both at front line and district managerial levels. Such tensions do not seem to be subject to much academic research. Furthermore, potential conflicts of interest are 'air brushed out' of highly abstract accounts of co-production where service systems, rather than the interaction of individuals, are the unit of analysis (Osborne et al., 2016, Farr, 2016). We had anticipated to see evidence of disagreement and tension between official and citizen co-producers, but there was no evidence that any had emerged in the direct interactions between regular and citizen co-producers. Rather they were evident among actors from the paid staff who were not actually involved in the co-production process. It would seem that the exploration of such tensions and passive obstructions would need to be more fully explored if the practice of co-production is to be adopted more widely by regular service producers.

6.2. Structure

Our study sheds light on how a co-production service is structured in a uniformed UK service. The notion of 'light structuring' (Hosking et al., 2012) emerged as a key feature of our conceptual framework as it allows to facilitate discussions amongst co-producers that could lead to learning and innovation in a range of services. The hierarchical structure and the command-control culture of the fire and rescue service seemed to be resistant to the inclusion of a 'light structure' that allows volunteers to take the lead on aspects of the service process. That the volunteer scheme was set up in a separate structure, and is likely to remain as such, suggests that mainstream service processes may not change because citizen co-producers are becoming a recognized or regular element of the service process. In addition to allowing volunteers to use their skills and judgement to respond to perceived needs of citizens, they also had discretion over the way they used their time. In contrast to hierarchical structures in which paid staff operate, volunteers are not bound by rules controlling their time and have the power to both invest more time and to withhold their participation.

6.3. Relational power

This study also offers new insights into the 'relational nature of power' (Stacey and Mowles, 2015, Hosking, 2004, Hosking et al., 2012) in leading a co-production. In service co-production the relational aspect is perhaps more visible because volunteers are not subject to positional power of the service managers, i.e., 'top-down power' that has been found to drive service situations even when they are characterized by 'shared' or 'distributed' leadership principles (Woods, forthcoming). Importantly, volunteers reported that the scheme manager was in charge of their work, despite the fact that they organized some of the work and leading on unintended service interventions as they saw fit. In that sense, they had 'power to' decide when and in some cases how a service, or part of a service, was delivered.

6.4. Core and complementary services

This study builds on Brandsen and Honingh's (2015) different types of co-production. We had argued that these typologies could also be different phases of a co-production but the findings revealed that the distinction between a core and a complementary service could contested and ambiguous as sometimes there could different views on whether a co-produced service is core or complementary or both. The managers pointed to the shifting purpose of the scheme saying that initially it was complementary but currently it was regarded as a core service, yet officially it did not contribute to the KPIs. The volunteers regarded their contributions as complementary. Further, in fire safety home visits, volunteers deliver a standard *pre-designed core service*, but in some cases they went beyond this and took the lead in creating a range of bespoke complementary services, using their individual skills, judgments and initiatives. In applying our findings to the analytical framework developed by Brandsen and Honingh (2015), we argue that within the same service process, volunteers can both deliver a core service and then design and deliver a complementary service. Hence in the case of the HFRS volunteer-led prevention service the matrix could move from one quadrant to another, as shown in the table below.

Table 3.

	Implementation by citizen co-producers	Design and implementation by citizen co-producers
Complementary		Design and implementation of complementary, bespoke services
Non-complementary	Implementation of a standard core fire prevention service	

Source: adapted from Brandsen and Honingh (2015)

So far we have presented volunteers as citizen co-producers, working with regular producers to deliver services. However, the application of the above analytical framework raises questions about who the actual co-producers are in our case. On one hand, we argue that paid staff and volunteers co-produce the fire prevention service. But on the other, we could argue that it is the volunteers who co-produce the fire prevention service with the citizens they engage with. Such a perspective points to a conceptual weakness in that volunteers are not considered to be regular providers of services who have variously been defined as having to be employed and paid by the service providing organization (Brandsen and Honingh, 2015). Hence more research on exploring the ambiguous roles citizens and paid staff can adopt in co-producing public services might be necessary.

The co-production process between volunteers employed by public service agencies and citizens these volunteers engage with also requires more detailed exploration. Our data suggests that in some cases volunteers do co-produce with the citizens whose homes they visit, for example befriending isolated people or advising vulnerable people on actions they could take to make themselves safer. But there are also references to volunteers 'making referrals' and 'reporting' issues to HFRS staff, which implies that volunteers take unilateral decisions without the input of citizens. Hence our preliminary findings here point to the need for a deeper exploration of the complementary services HFRS volunteers deliver. This would contribute to a wider debate on different roles individuals can perform in the co-production process and perhaps also reveal dynamics between individual and collective acts of co-production (Pestoff, 2012).

7. Conclusions

This study has a number of implications for practice and theory. First, focusing on leadership it sensitizes paid staff and citizen co-producers to the shifting and the relational nature of power. In co-production power tends to be negotiated and shared, thinking about how citizens co-producers could harness and influence power, rather than assuming that power resides with someone or some group, promises to release innovative energies. In the case of HFRS the extent of citizen co-producers' contribution to core services may not be obvious to senior management or regular firefighters who have no or limited contact with volunteers. Given that the UK fire service is facing profound transition and change, better evaluation and feedback to paid and unpaid providers would seem essential to facilitate strategic change.

In terms of theoretical implications the application of a framework concerned with leadership and its core dimensions of structure, power and motivation has generated important insights. Of particular note would be to exercise caution in subscribing to a service system perspective

which promises to uncover the complexities of the service process. We would argue that focusing on the specific interactions of regular and citizen co-producers generates more tangible and perhaps also more controversial insights.

Lastly, the dynamic nature of the service process needs to be acknowledged in attempts to classify different types of service co-production. As our study shows, a pre-designed core service can be 'extended' into something that is designed and delivered by the volunteer as a complementary service. In the second stage of this study further attention needs to be given to the interaction between volunteer service providers and citizens to explore whether what we have classified here as complementary services are in fact co-produced, or whether volunteers adopt processes that mirror those of regular service provision. If the latter were the case the implication would be that citizens are taking over the role of regular service producers, but in an unpaid capacity. This points to the need for a stronger framework to distinguish between regular and citizen co-producers in situations where volunteers perform, to some degree, the role of the regular, paid service producer.

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