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Debate: If citizen participation is so important, why has it not been achieved?

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This article aims to inspire debate on citizen participation and public management. Since the 1960s, the conceptualization of participation has evolved predominantly under five narratives of public service reform—New Public Administration (NPA), New Public Management (NPM), Public Value (PV), New Public Service (NPS) and New Public Governance (NPG). While featuring persuasively under some of these narratives, participation and its associated benefits have not been fully translated in practice (Roberts, 2004). The principal reason for this is the flawed conceptualization of participation, which fails to articulate its multi-dimensional nature, its locus and its impact on value creation. Consequently, we present *Public Service Logic* (PSL) as an alternative narrative through which a more holistic conception of participation may be formulated.

The narratives of citizen participation

Within the five narratives, participation has been framed as achieving increased democracy, service improvement and innovation (Frederickson, 1996; Dunston et al., 2009; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). However, as the pre-eminent narrative, NPM has been criticized for its disregard of citizen participation (for example Christensen and Lægreid, 2011). There are two main reasons for its absence:

- First, as an offshoot of the NPM, managerialism, which implies closed decision-making by experts (Ansell and Gash, 2007) overshadows direct participation.
- Second, the construction of citizens as consumers or ‘lay people’ whose role is mediated by public managers who, by contrast, are cast as powerful protagonists with the capacity to catalyse deep transformations (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004).

The four other narratives presented here have developed largely in response to the failings of NPM. NPA argued for the restoration of democratic values by placing citizens at the centre of decision-making processes (Frederickson, 1996). To achieve this, it called for power dispersal through structural changes such as decentralization (Vigado, 2002; Nabatchi, 2012).

Through the seminal work of Moore (1995), PV endorsed a more collaborative approach which aimed to create ‘public value’. Although different iterations of PV have developed (for example Stoker, 2006; Bryson et al., 2014) participation is a central construct. It entails political interaction through networks of deliberation between elected/appointed government officials and key stakeholders within civil society (Benington and Moore, 2011).

NPS takes a strong normative stance, calling for active citizenship as route to cohesive and inclusive societies (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). Here, the NPM idea of self-interested consumers is expanded to a shared vision of ‘public interest’ (deLeon and Denhardt, 2000). The role of government is also altered; it ‘serves rather than steers’ and public managers are positioned as ‘transformative leaders’ who negotiate, enable and facilitate participation (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015).

Within NPG, and latterly ‘collaborative governance’, new structures and spaces of influence have been described as increasing participation among a plurality of actors (Sorenson and Torfing, 2018). Service users have been re-conceptualized as co-producers working in a horizontal, interactive and co-operative relationship with public service providers, primarily during service delivery (Meijer, 2016).

Challenges for participation

Despite featuring within each of the narratives, in practice participation has continued to be consigned to the periphery of public service production (Roberts, 2004). There are four reasons for this:

- First, public services are predominantly understood within a linear model of service production, where production and consumption are defined as distinct processes and actors play discrete roles (i.e. public service organizations design and deliver services, which service users consume separately). Participative processes are thus appended to service production and are controlled by public service staff in terms of both process and impact.
- Second, the call for increased participation has been framed latterly as a polemic against NPM, but with limited evidence of efficacy. None of the narratives presented here have overcome the challenges of NPM.
- Third, structural changes, such as decentralization, deliberative processes and networks, have failed to embed participation, which continues to be appended as an addition or alternative to the mainstream models.
- Finally, power asymmetries have been reinforced across the narratives, mainly through the differentiation of the roles public managers, stakeholders and service users play, with power generally being retained and exercised by the former two (Ansell and Gash, 2007).

Learning from Public Service Logic (PSL)

PSL centres on value, to individual service users, the public and society, the creation of which is the primary goal of public services (Alford, 2016). It proposes a multi-dimensional model of value creation (Osborne, 2018) which starts with the integral role of service users, but also extends to organizations and wider society which interact during the complex processes of value creation (Trischler and Charles, 2019). In a public service context, value creation is about

five elements. These are: (1) the impact of such services upon the satisfaction of service users with these services and upon their well-being; (2) the service outcomes of public services; (3) the effect of public services of the whole life experience of citizens; (4) the ability of public services to create capacity in citizens for the future; and (5) the contribution of public services to creating value at the societal level (Osborne, 2020).

PSL differentiates the participation into four processes: two intrinsic roles that are unavoidable (co-experience and co-construction) and two extrinsic roles that can be designed into public services (co-production and co-design). Through this distinction, PSL offers a more holistic understanding of the role of public service users in value creation (and indeed its destruction also). Although it suggests, like the other narratives, that extrinsic forms of participation can be enabled, it contends that their application should be pragmatic and sensitive (Osborne et al., 2013). PSL also emphasizes the extent to which participation can occur both as part of the production of public services and their use ('consumption'). By focusing on the supply and demand sides, participation can be articulated both as a means and an end to value creation. Moreover, by shifting the focus from single public service delivery to the creation of value, PSL offers a view of participation that is holistic rather than an 'end in itself'. Thus, the role of citizen is value creator (Gronroos and Voima, 2013). The role of professionals, by contrast, changes to value facilitator and co-creator; they can only make service offerings based upon a promise of value (Skalen et al., 2018; Gronroos, 2019). It is this holistic understanding of participation offered by PSL which enriches its conceptualization and which will ultimately support its achievement in a way that previous public service reforms have failed to do.

The re-conceptualization of participation presented here has three important implications for public service management. First, the effective management of the service encounter is fundamental due to the intrinsic nature of participation. Public service staff need the capacity to engage with and fully understand service users' needs, as well as the skills to facilitate value creation during the service experience. Second, a pragmatic approach to extrinsic forms of participation is necessary; the application of co-production and co-design could be appropriate, but this depends on the context. Finally, and perhaps most challenging, PSL suggests the need for deep cultural change, particularly with regards to traditional power relations and the understanding of how and by whom public services are designed and delivered. For PSL, the service user and their experience is a central component of effective service management and therefore value creation.

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