



Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

OSUVA Open
Science

This is a self-archived – parallel published version of this article in the publication archive of the University of Vaasa. It might differ from the original.

Creating Opportunity Spaces for Co-Production : Professional Co-Producers in Inter- Organizational Collaborations

Author(s): Brix, Jacob; Tuurnas, Sanna; Mortensen, Nanna Møller

Title: Creating Opportunity Spaces for Co-Production : Professional Co-Producers in Inter-Organizational Collaborations

Year: 2021

Version: Published version

Copyright © 2004-2021 by IGI Global All rights reserved.

Please cite the original version:

Brix, J., Tuurnas, S. & Mortensen, N. M. (2021). Creating Opportunity Spaces for Co-Production : Professional Co-Producers in Inter-Organizational Collaborations. In: Thomassen, A. O. & Jensen, J. B. (eds.) *Processual Perspectives on the Co-Production Turn in Public Sector Organizations*, 157-175. Hershey PA : IGI Global.
<https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-4975-9.ch009>

CREATING OPPORTUNITY SPACES FOR CO-PRODUCTION:

Professional Co-Producers in Inter-Organizational Collaborations

Jacob Brix, Aalborg University, Denmark.
Sanna Tuurnas, University of Vaasa, Finland &
Nanna Møller Mortensen, Aalborg University, Denmark

ABSTRACT

This chapter builds a conceptual model for how inter-organizational relationships can be built in such way that they enable the creation of learning across administrative and organizational boundaries. The conceptual model is discussed in relation to the body of knowledge concerning co-production and the new roles required by organizational members and frontline staff when services cut across these boundaries. The argument is, that it is becoming increasingly important for professional co-producers and their organizations to identify, analyse and improve the opportunity space for co-production when this opportunity space unfolds beyond one organization.

Keywords: Co-Exploration and Co-Exploitation, Co-Production, Collaborative Governance, Inter-Organizational Learning, Inter-Organizational Relationships, Management of Collaboration.

1. INTRODUCTION

As co-production is becoming more and more institutionalized in organizations in the western world—and especially Northern Europe—there is a need to better understand how this change affects the daily life of the professional co-producers (OECD, 2011; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018; Mortensen et al., 2020). The argument is that the public servants in their (new) role as professional co-producers need to navigate in a work context that is at a ‘crossroads’ constituted by a hybrid collection of different public management regimes, for example, Old Public Administration, New Public Management and New Public Governance (Blomgren & Waks, 2015; Pestoff, 2019). The complexity of this ‘hybridity’ has increased, correspondingly, with the manifestation of New Public Governance as the latest “wave” of public management reform. The argument is, that inter-organizational collaborations and networks have increasingly started to play a crucial role in delivering public services, highlighting open government, active citizenship and co-production as core ideas for the progressive development

of processes of public administration (Osborne, 2010; Verschuere et al., 2012; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015; Pestoff, 2019). Currently, professional co-producers not only need to perform their work across different administrative boundaries, but (some) are also expected to collaborate with other co-producers across different organizational boundaries and contexts (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015; Mortensen et al., 2020). Because of this complexity, different local responses to the potential of co-producing public services have been numerous and varied, and different definitions have been made to demark what co-production is and what it is not (Brandsen et al., 2018). Instead of aiming at creating a universal and all-inclusive definition to co-production, Pestoff (2019) suggest that the current literature can be reframed into three different *schools of co-production*: The Input-Output school, the Value Chain school, and the Public Value Creation school. This study is connected to the Value Chain school of co-production that according to Pestoff (2019) is based on a service management perspective building primarily on the research of Bovaird (2007) and Bovaird & Loeffler (2012). It is clearly possible to posit that co-production is a process that can be divided into many different sub-processes in which it (with or without citizens) can take place. In other words, this 'school' treats co-production from a *processual perspective* where activities as sub-processes e.g. can be commissioned or co-commissioned, designed or co-designed, delivered or co-delivered, and evaluated or co-evaluated; but where the entire process has to have a co-produced activity to be operationally defined as such (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015; Brix et al., 2020). Hence, to enable collaborative co-production processes that cut across administrative and organizational boundaries focus has to be both on the *organizational level partners* and on the *professional and citizen co-producers*, as well as on the formal *planning* and the *execution of activities* (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015; Pestoff, 2019). Finally, it should be mentioned here that 'value' is interwoven in all co-production processes. (Alford, 2014; Osborne et al., 2015). As Alford (2014, 306) notes, private, group and public value co-exist in co-production, and can at times even be at odds with each other. This notion is strongly connected to democracy and representativeness in co-production (see, Jaspers & Steen, 2019; Vanleene, 2020), and it is often the professionals who balance between different types of values in co-production, for instance by supporting some service user groups to participate in co-production, or by protecting public value (Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). Finally, co-production can also lead to wider value creation, as citizens engaging as co-producers may create not only the private value they receive from service delivery, but also the public value as it is delivered to other clients or stakeholders who do not necessarily participate in the co-production process (Bovaird & Löffler, 2012).

1.1 Purpose of the Chapter

The point of departure for this chapter is that the authors see an increasing tendency in inter-organizational collaborations such as alliances and partnerships that are defined top-down to provide high quality public services to citizens and to improve efficiency (e.g. Pestoff, 2019; van den Oever & Martin, 2019). Sometimes such collaborations are characterized for example by ‘purchase-of-services’ contracts between private sector organizations and the public sector, and other times ‘(...) *the public sector works collaboratively with all other sectors, drawing on resources and expertise across organizational boundaries as a partner rather than a purchaser or supporter*’ (Sandfort & Milward, 2009, p.148). Creating well-functioning collaborations across organizational boundaries is however not an easy task, because each professional co-producer has to work as effectively and efficiently as possible within their own and other (professional) co-producer’s institutional logics to manage the complexity and to cope with this complexity (Blomgren & Waks, 2015; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015).

Therefore, many questions arise, for example ‘*how can professional co-producers and their respective organizations create an opportunity space for co-production that cut across organizational boundaries?*’ And ‘*how can “collaborative advantages” be enabled and “collaborative inertia” avoided in actions entailing co-production?*’. According to Sandfort & Milward (2009), one of the fundamental issues that arise is, that new ‘(...) *partnerships involve altering the connections between organizations and the arrangement of services, it is reasonable to expect that these efforts influence the capacity of front-line staff, managers, organizations, or systems to deliver services*’ (Sandfort & Milward, 2009, p.162). In other words, there is an increasing need to build the capacity to co-produce, so the professional co-producers can potentially become better able to coordinate and communicate within and between administrative and organizational boundaries, e.g. when (co-)defining, (co-)delivering and (co-)refining the service to and with the members of society whose lives will be impacted upon by the resultant proposed changes or developments (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018; Mortensen et al., 2020). Capacity building in this sense is the development and use of collective actions that increase the collaborative power and efficiency of the involved professionals so they engage in continuous improvement and innovation for co-production outcomes (Brix, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to propose a conceptual model that can help analyze and explain how professional co-producers can take on the new role as inter-organizational actors and how the

organizations the professional co-producers work in need to create an opportunity space for co-production in which this new work-related role can be developed and optimally utilized (Mortensen et al., 2020). In building this model, the authors draw on theories of inter-organizational learning (e.g. Lane & Lubatkin, 1998; Holmqvist, 2003; Jones & MacPherson, 2006; Schultz & Geithner, 2010; Peronard & Brix, 2019; Anand et al., 2020) and inter-organizational relationships (e.g. Ring & Van de Ven, 1994; Dyer & Singh, 1998; Sandfort & Milward, 2009; Dyer et al., 2018). The argument for introducing these literatures into the co-production body of knowledge is based on the following premise. *First*, theories of inter-organizational learning emphasize how knowledge is created and transferred in different ways across organizational boundaries, and how new knowledge from inter-organizational collaborations becomes adopted to realize new potential value within the individual organization (Anand et al., 2020). *Secondly*, theories of inter-organizational relationships enable the analysis and discussion of distinctly different kinds of collaboration and how these may potentially require different approaches to applied governance when solutions for co-exploration and co-exploitation are required (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). In short: theories of inter-organizational relationships help explain how an efficient and effective collaboration can be built and maintained with the ambition of keeping coordination costs down for all parties. The discussion will center around how the model can be used as a point of reference when professional co-producers need to build both capacity and capability in being able to adapt to the new hybrid role as coordinators and information processors, so that citizens can potentially experience optimal quality in the service they receive and co-produce as a direct consequence (Tuurnas, 2020; Mortensen et al., 2020; Peronard & Brix, 2019). This is indeed a complex task because the learning processes that the professional co-producers need to engage in are both related to ‘how they co-produce with other (professional) co-producers across organizational boundaries’ and ‘how they translate the new knowledge into better practices locally’ that in the end will generate better outcomes (Bovaird, 2007; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015, Mortensen, 2020).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the following, section 2.1 starts by unfolding current research on the ‘new roles of professional co-producers’. After having introduced this part of the co-production literature, in section 2.2. a brief summary of the literature on inter-organizational learning is presented. Hereafter, section 2.3 provides a brief overview of the literature on inter-organizational relationships. As the final part of the theoretical background, a synthesis in section 2.4 is created in which a model for learning in inter-

organizational relationships is conceptualized. This conceptualization will be used afterwards in the discussion to propose why and how the new role of the professional co-producer, from a conceptual perspective, could look like when their work cut across organizational boundaries.

2.1 The (new) Roles of Professional Co-Producers

For public service professionals the New Public Governance regime has meant changes in the formulations of their professional communities (Blomgren & Waks, 2015) e.g. by emphasising the need for inter-organisational communities and networking (Brandsen & Honingh, 2013). Inter-organisational communities also mean that the knowledge structures become more dispersed, affecting the very core of professionals' work (Pestoff, 2019), and due to the rising trend of co-production, professionals also need to extend their professional communities to include citizen or client knowledge (Tuurnas, 2015; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018, Mortensen et al., 2020). An example illustrating the bidirectional pressure to open up from a single professionals' point of view is presented in study of Tuurnas et al. (2015). Here, the clients, in this case children and young people with a need for social services, often need multiple services from different service providers simultaneously. Professionals working in youth services expressed concerns about working in a client-centred way in the context of inter-organisational networks, as in these networks there competing sectorial interests and complex understandings as well as lacking responsibility of coordination. In other words: multiple institutional logics were in play and confronted each other (Blomgren & Waks, 2015). Despite the intention of working in a client-centred way, service processes were often dictated by organisational issues rather than the interests of the young. In the same way, the study of Rossi & Tuurnas (2019) illustrated that that the complexity of organizational actors' understanding of the service users' needs, value of the service and the roles of actors caused conflicts among the actors. These examples illustrate the complex nature of co-production as a social phenomenon. In addition to the network co-operation with other professionals, the professional work also intrinsically includes negotiations and interactions with clients and citizens in their different roles (Krogstrup & Brix, 2019). According to the latest public management trends of public-centeredness in services and co-creation of value (cf. Osborne et al., 2015), professionals are expected to negotiate both the process and its outcomes with client co-producers as part of their work routines. Moreover, strategic processes, such as neighbourhood development activities, include negotiations among many different stakeholders, such as citizens, communities and private sector actors (Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003; Kleinmans, 2017). Typically for human interactions, these negotiations include a lot of complexity.

Traditionally, professionals are considered to solve such complex situations by leaning on their professional expertise (Lipsky, 1980; Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003; Krogstrup & Brix, 2019). While professionals certainly have opportunities to use their expertise in such situations, the knowledge-hierarchy between professional and the client is changing from a top-down, one-directional relationship to a collaborative relationship based on user empowerment and interdependence (Ewert & Evers, 2012; Bovaird, 2007; Moynihan & Thomas, 2013). In this regard Mortensen et al. (2020) reflect on the complexity as ‘double’ or ‘triple’ pressures stemming from the top-down, the bottom-up and the horizontal logics that co-exist. Moreover, legitimacy as the core of professionalism is no longer based solely on professional standards but on organizational output and collaboration skills, as well. (Brandsen & Honingh, 2013; Sullivan, 2000). The logic of co-production also challenges the position of professional, for instance by decreasing professional discretion in collaborative setting (Sehested, 2002; Taylor & Kelly, 2006, Tuurnas et al., 2016). Overall, it can be said that co-production may challenge the work of professionals in various ways, but as Noordegraaf (2015) rightly notes, public professionals will be able to remain their role as experts also in the collaborative environment. What is changing is the usage and sharing of expertise in different collaborative settings. According to Noordegraaf (2015, p. 201):

“Professionals [...] are able to link their expertise to (1) other professionals and their expertise, (2) other actors in organizational settings, including managers and staff, (3) clients and citizens, (4) external actors that have direct stakes in the services rendered, and (5) outside actors that have indirect stakes, such as journalists, inspectorates and policy makers.”

While linking and sharing of professionals’ expertise can be seen as a huge potential for organisations (and for individual professionals), it also requires a lot of learning and opening up the professional boundaries (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015). As the studies of neighbourhood development project and youth services by an interorganisational team illustrates, (cf. Tuurnas, 2015; Tuurnas et al. 2015), learning to communicate across organisational boundaries, not to mention including clients of citizens in decision-making, can be a difficult task for professionals. This is especially the case in organisational arrangements which do not support collaboration but rather put organisational members in contradictory situations and competing positions (such can be the case in purchaser-provider-models; cf. Tuurnas et al., 2015; Blomgren & Waks, 2015). In the following the literature on inter-organizational learning is introduced to commence the process of building the conceptual framework which is proposed to the co-production body of knowledge.

2.2 Inter-Organizational Learning

An important feature of inter-organizational learning is the understanding of ‘what’ the individual organization needs to learn from one another when they initiate a collaboration (Anand et al., 2020). Depending on this perspective, scholars have focused on the *types of collaboration* that enable inter-organizational learning (Larsson et al., 1998). In the work of Larsson *et al.*, inter-organizational learning is “*achieved by transferring existing knowledge from one organization, as well as by creating completely new knowledge through interaction among organizations*” (Larsson et al., 1998, p. 289). In other words, the learning relationship can be based on the premise that knowledge exist beforehand at the individual actors, or the premise can be, that the collaboration will lead to the creation of new, valuable knowledge. This perspective is unfolded by Lane and Lubatkin (1998).

In their seminal work, Lane & Lubatkin (1998) explain that three learning approaches exist in the inter-organizational learning process: a) passive learning, b) active learning, and c) interactive learning. The first two approaches to learning represent the transfer of knowledge that is explicit in nature, where one organization is regarded as ‘student firm’ and the other the ‘teacher firm’. *Passive learning* is proxied as the transfer of explicit knowledge from one actor to another e.g. technical process specifications. *Active learning* can take shape as e.g. consultancy, where the actor(s) from one organization is advising actors from another organization and hence creating a ‘learning dyad’ (Lane & Lubatkin, 1998). When the inter-organizational relationship requires that the actors go beyond the ‘roles’ of being either a student or teacher firm, they are— in theory —expected to initiate an *interactive learning* process, which implies that they collaborate to create new knowledge. The individual actor does hence also therefore become responsible to integrate this new knowledge with their individual, existing knowledge to make it valuable for their own organization (see e.g. also Holmqvist, 2003; Schulz & Geithner, 2010; Peronard & Brix, 2019).

According to Holmqvist (2003, 2004) the link between intra- and inter-organizational learning is a two-level-game operationalized by the process of *intertwining*. With the concept of *intertwining*, Holmqvist (2003) proposes that the link between intra- and inter-organizational learning is operationalized by activities related to exploration and exploitation occurring both on the inter and intra-organizational levels.

The perspectives presented in this brief summary of inter-organizational learning theory exemplifies that learning across administrative and organizational boundaries can occur in two different domains. The first domain is suggested to be oriented towards ‘learning to collaborate’ and the second domain is ‘learning to create high quality services most efficiently’. To understand the first domain, ‘learning to collaborate’, the literature on inter-organizational relationships is unfolded to build a theoretically informed frame in which this learning process can take place. The second domain will be analyzed in the discussion section, where the intersection between the three theoretical perspectives united in this chapter is analyzed: inter-organizational learning, inter-organizational relationships, and co-production. In the following, theoretical perspectives on inter-organizational relationships are unfolded.

2.3 Inter-Organizational Relationships

In studies of inter-organizational relationships in the public sector, focus has been on for example ‘service integration’, ‘strategic alliances’, and ‘community partnerships’ as different types of collaboration (see e.g. Sandfort & Milward, 2009; Krogstrup & Brix, 2019; Pestoff, 2019; van den Oeven & Martin, 2019). The literature aims— among other things —to develop collaborative know-how and to capture the collaborative advantages of co-exploration and co-exploitation (Huxham & Vangen, 2013; Parmigiani & Riviera-Santos, 2011). The inter-organizational relationship literature has two overall sub-streams when it comes to public sector research; one that treats the collaboration as an outcome of managerial and/or political action, and another that treats the collaboration as a ‘means to an end’ where focus is on *if* and *how* new types of collaboration have contributed to new outcomes (Sandfort & Milward, 2009). To build and maintain well-functioning inter-organizational relationships focus needs to be on the *interface strategies* that are employed by the actors from the participating organizations (Mandell & Keast, 2008). In addition to this, focus in the literature is divided into scholarly work that aims at understanding if the changes implemented are made to improve ‘system efficiency’ of service providers, to ‘repackage existing services’, or to altering the content of services because new resources become available via the collaboration (Sandfort & Milward, 2009). The argument is— among other things —that new management skills are needed and that a new language for inter-organizational relationships has to be developed in practice. According to Mandell & Keast (2008, p. 190), there is a:

'(...) need to establish flexible and adaptable structures, non-hierarchical and participatory decision-making, building relationships through developing mutual respect, understanding, and trust, capacity building, defining an overriding mission, building consensus, and managing conflict'.

This perspective takes us back to the groundbreaking work of Ring & Van de Ven (1994). According to these scholars, there are multiple challenges that must be addressed when creating, sustaining and developing an inter-organizational relationship. The argument is, that actors being part in inter-organizational arrangements will experience counter-productive issues along the way as the collaboration is ongoing and as changes in the context occur: *'With time, misunderstandings, conflicts, and changing expectations among the parties are inevitable, and these factors can provide cause for rethinking the terms of the relationship'* (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994, p. 98). Therefore, building a relationship based on trust is important, but such a relationship is not created instantly (Das & Teng, 1998). According to Das & Teng, communication is one of the most important mechanisms for building and maintaining trust: *'(...) communication irons out the kinks in daily operations and makes for a satisfactory working relationship'* (Das & Teng, 1998, p.504). The argument here is that actors in new inter-organizational relationships may not know and understand each other and that they may have different objectives and interest with the collaboration. One of the only ways to build a well-functioning inter-organizational relationship is for the participating actor to experience what works and what does not for them and then engage in the crucial dialogue to improve the job to be done and to strengthen the relationship (Mandell & Keast, 2008; Krogstrup & Brix, 2019).

2.3.1 Key components in inter-organizational relationships

Mandell & Keast (2008) establish that the *remits*, *responsibilities*, and the *resources* of the individual actors need to be understood and how these relate to the purpose and goal of the collaboration. The remits can for example be a 'social group' such as minorities or the remit can be directed at a 'sectoral focus' such as education or health. The responsibilities can be of 'strategic' or 'operational' character. Strategic responsibilities are regarded as activities aiming at influencing policy and operational responsibilities relate to the concrete work tasks that need to be performed. Finally, the resources need to be understood as 'availability', 'amount' and also the 'source' and 'nature' of the resources (Mandell & Keast, 2008, pp.209-210). On a more specific level, Dyer & Singh (1998) establish that 'complementary resources and capabilities', 'relational specific assets', 'knowledge sharing routines'

and ‘effective governance’ represent the cornerstones of inter-organizational relationships. These key components are briefly summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Components in inter-organizational relationships

Component	Explanation	Note
Effective governance	Is about ensuring cooperation among partner organizations and at the same time keeping the cost of coordination to a minimum.	The type of interdependence between resources affects how much coordination that is needed between partner organizations. Reciprocal complementarity of resources requires a higher degree of co-specialization and coordination compared to resources that complements one another in sequential or pooled interdependences.
Complementary resources & capabilities (and their interdependence)	The synergy-sensitive resources of each partner can be understood as resources that create more value put together compared to if the resource stands alone. The interdependence between partner resources can – in theory – be <i>pooled, sequential or reciprocal</i> .	Resources can be: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tangible (equipment, technology, locations, etc.) 2. Intangible (know-how, knowledge, etc.) 3. ‘Both’ tangible and intangible.
Relational-specific assets	The physical assets required to coordinate information across administrative and organizational boundaries, for example information technology, shared database systems, and/or physical locations.	Assets might already exist such as smartphones, tablets etc. but assets can also be shared databases, ICT systems, etc. that needs investment.
Knowledge-sharing routines	A regular pattern of interaction between partners that enables the transfer of information, the recombination or knowledge, or the creation of specialized knowledge.	Routines are not built in one day. The ambition is to built well-functioning routines over time so partners know ‘what’ to share, ‘when’ to share, and ‘in what form’ to share information, for example via the relational specific assets.

Source: Authors’ own development (summary of Dyer et al., 2018)

The point is that the four key components are strongly linked together and that they influence one another. It is of most importance to understand exactly ‘what’ binds the organizational partners together (the complementary resources and capabilities) and ‘how’ these resources are linked (their interdependence). The argument is that the ‘effective governance’ needed to enable the operationalization of the inter-organizational collaboration has to take its point of departure in investing in the ‘relational-specific assets’ and hereafter to promote how effective and well-functioning ‘knowledge-sharing routines’ between inter-organizational actors can be built and

maintained. A constant focus on the effective governance is important, because the degree of complementarity of resources is not necessarily fixed over time (Dyer et al., 2018). In this regard the perspective of ‘inter-organizational learning’ presented above represents a relevant auxiliary theoretical perspective to operationalize the learning processes required to build and maintain relevant collaborations based on activities of co-exploration and co-exploitation (Anand et al., 2020).

2.4 Synthesis of Inter-Organizational Learning and -Relationship Literature

One of the first critical questions that arise when comparing the literature on inter-organizational relationships and – learning is whether or not a collaboration between organizational actors requires learning at all. The point is, that if a collaboration is based on transferring technical know-how back and forward across organizational boundaries to solve technical/simple problems (passive learning), then the need for learning is not necessarily big (Lane & Lubatkin, 1998; Krogstrup & Brix, 2019). However, this critical perspective can quickly be toned down, because the argument is, that history determines that contextual variables are changing and therefore the need for the ‘same package’ will therefore consequently also change if it needs to remain relevant (Dyer et al., 2018). Instead, another critical question that is more important to pose is ‘*how learning-oriented is our inter-organizational collaboration?*’. In other words: *Do we challenge our own assumptions about the interface strategies we employ and do we have a collective vision about how the mix of our complementary resources lead to the desired outcomes of the clients/citizens?*

In the following the conceptual model for ‘learning in inter-organizational relationships’ is presented; see Figure 1. The conceptual model consists of the components presented above in Table 1 – please refer to this table for recalling the definitions and explanations.

*** Insert Figure 1 around here ***

Figure 1 can be used to illustrate the point, that learning needs to take place in at least two levels when collaborating with external actors (Holmqvist, 2003; 2004). The argument is, that the individual actor has to learn to collaborate as a partner in the collaboration, so the collective goals are met satisfactorily (Peronard & Brix, 2019). In addition to this, the individual actor has to learn how to adapt local (intra-organizational) routines and work- and information flows in such way that the

individual actor organization supports the mutual collaboration via a process of intertwining (Holmqvist, 2003; 2004). A key aspect to understand these learning processes that need to take place are then, e.g. to define and agree upon what the strategic and operational responsibilities are (Mandell & Keast, 2008) so the ‘content’ of the collaboration can be analyzed according to the model.

Following questions would be relevant to answer in collaboration:

- Why are we collaborating: is it an efficiency-oriented strategy; a repackaging of existing services, or the creation of new services to the clients/citizens?
- What are the complementary resources that binds the collaborating actors together? – And how are these resources complementary?
- Which technological/digital opportunities are/will be available for to enable the sharing of information? – And is there any physical location allocated where actors from different organizations can meet?
- How will the collaborating actors secure that well-functioning knowledge sharing routines are built? – And how will the collaborating actors ensure that a continuous search for improvement in the collaboration is searched for?

In the following, it is discussed how the conceptual model and the questions pertaining to this model can be utilized to identify the need for capacity building so the collaborating actors are enabled to learn both how to collaborate and also how to co-produce relevant services to or together with the clients or citizens.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 The New Role of Professional Co-Producers in Inter-Organizational Collaborations

In the introduction the authors asked two questions: 1) ‘*how can professional co-producers and their respective organizations create an opportunity space for co-production that cut across organizational boundaries?*’ And 2) ‘*how can “collaborative advantages” be enabled and “collaborative inertia” avoided in collaborative partnerships?*’. When returning to the literature on the role of the professional in co-production and analyzing this literature by use of the conceptualized model in Figure 1, following perspectives emerge as suggested answers to these questions.

3.1.1 Effective governance

For the governance of an inter-organizational relationship to be effective the collaborating parties, (which could potentially be a bricolage of local governments, private organizations, third sector organizations, etc. (Pestoff, 2019)) first need to make clear ‘*who*’ the co-production process is to help (the remit) (Mandell & Keast, 2008). Second, the collaborating parties need to define ‘*what*’ the co-production need is. Third, they need to make clear ‘*which resources they have individually*’ and ‘*how these resources complement each other to co-deliver the service*’ to/with the (group) of citizens (Mandell & Keast, 2008; Dyer et al., 2018). The degree to which the clients/citizens are involved in such a co-production process is a pre-scientific decision that will be locally determined, depending on the capacity of the (group of) individuals (Krogstrup & Brix, 2019). Examples of complementary resources and capabilities are given in the next section. Once the collaborating organizations have agreed to the answers to the ‘*who*’, ‘*what*’, and ‘*how*’ of the collaborative co-production process, they can initiate the co-production process and as they gain experience start reflecting upon ‘*what works for us locally in the collaboration?*’, ‘*What works for the citizens?*’, And ‘*what needs to be improved?*’. Knowledge created in such reflection process and dialogue pertaining hereto will represent the foundation of a learning-oriented collaboration (Anand et al., 2020).

3.1.2 *Complementary resources and capabilities*

The concrete, local co-production process between at least two organizational actors will require an overview of ‘*which*’ resources and capabilities that need to be allocated by ‘*who*’ and ‘*how*’ these resources and capabilities complement each other to create a ‘*complete service*’ (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015). The idea is– from the service management logic (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Pestoff, 2019) – that most services are enabled by organizational members and performed by professional and citizen co-producers. The creation of a mapping of the ‘*content*’ of sub-processes and the sub-processes (Peronard & Brix, 2019) can make possible an analysis of and an improvement of the processes, and the outputs and the outcomes of these, cf. section 3.1.1 effective governance. An example of a template can be seen below in Figure 2:

*** Insert figure 2 here ***

The idea with the illustration in Figure 2 is to clarify that a co-production process can have activities (sub-processes) that are co-produced with citizens (marked by an Asterisk *) and not co-produced with citizens (not marked by Asterisk). In addition to this all actors do not necessarily need access to

all information, and therefore the dotted arrows illustrate from where to whom information need to flow as the co-production process unfolds. Although Figure 2 is illustrated as a process with a beginning and an end, collaborative co-production can easily take shape as an iterative process co-exploration and co-exploitation that is acted out continuously to create the outcomes that are expected (Brix et al., 2020). An example illustrating such collaborative processes is from the city of Aalborg, where the municipality has launched a service to help people with a disability pension to find what they consider to be ‘meaningful work’, by helping them locate and contact relevant communities, employers and support organizations (Aalborg Aktiv, n.d.). The service is part of the municipality’s broader strategic vision for improving the quality of life of people with disabilities, and to help people with different disabilities to find meaningful work, such as volunteering at an animal shelter or working a few hours at a café (Mortensen, 2018, 2020). This means that the service is made in collaboration with different organizations and organizational actors from non-public organizations e.g. private companies, voluntary organizations, and other municipal organizations e.g. residential care homes, municipal community centers, or/and case workers. The service is hence made as a collaboration between organizations that co-produce with citizens and organization that do not co-produce with citizens. Depending on the collaboration, the organizations will have access to different information, and information about the citizens are only shared with the citizens or their guardian’s permission (Mortensen, 2020).

3.1.2 *Relational-specific assets*

To enable the collaborative co-production process there needs to be digital technology where relevant data and information can be shared and stored, and also digital and physical locations where professional co-producers can meet with other professionals and with the citizen co-producers (Das & Teng, 1998; Dyer et al., 2018). Depending on the mix of complementary resources and capabilities the need will differ for the degree and requirement of digital technology. The argument is, that there e.g. would be a difference in the need and requirement for sharing data and information between collaborative co-production in healthcare with chronic patients (Bellamy, 2009; Williams & Caley, 2020) compared to collaborative co-production of the rejuvenation of urban areas (Kleinhans, 2017). Key questions that are relevant to find answers to are “*what is ‘need to know’ for the individual actors so they can deliver what is expected?*”, and “*when do they need to know this so they can deliver what is expected?*”. In other words, the ability for organizational members and professional and citizen co-producers to share data and information is imperative, because precise and clear communication is –

as stated earlier – a key mechanism for a successful collaboration (Das & Teng, 1998; Dyer et al., 2018). Such clear communication and answers to ‘what and when’ data should be shared can be developed via ‘knowledge sharing routines’ related to the collaboration.

3.1.3 Knowledge sharing routines

When the understanding of ‘how’, ‘why’, ‘when’ and ‘by whom’ the complementary resources and capabilities have to be performed, and that the relational specific assets become available, the next step is to build knowledge sharing routines (Dyer et al., 2018). The argument is, that the actors involved in the collaborative co-production process need to experience how the process unfolds and where improvements can be made to create e.g. a more efficiency or better outputs and outcomes (Krogstrup & Brix, 2019). This concerns both organizational members and professional and citizen co-producers. The sub-processes and their constellation have to make sense, and to enable the improvement of these processes and their connection to one another openness and dialogue is imperative to create collaborative know-how and a common language for collaborative co-production (Mandell & Keast, 2008; Huxham & Vangen, 2013). The point is, that knowledge sharing routines will enable the betterment of the paradoxical collaborative management that “(...) *requires managers to be autonomous yet independent, and they need to be participative and authoritative at the same time*” (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015, p.589). According to scholars Ring & Van de Ven (1994), openness and dialogue concerning the paradoxical tensions of co-exploration and co-exploitation represent the foundation for creating inter-organizational relationships that is based on trust, which as a reminder is a key mechanism for successful collaborations and also for co-production (Boyle & Harris, 2009; Parmigiani & Riviera-Santos, 2011; Fledderus et al., 2014; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015; Krogstrup & Brix, 2019).

3.2 Implications

The implications that arise by introducing our conceptual model to the co-production literature is illustrated by examples of advantages and barriers in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Co-production in inter-organizational relationships

Component	Explanation	Co-production	
		Advantage	Barrier

Effective governance	Is about ensuring cooperation among partner organizations and at the same time keeping the cost of coordination to a minimum.	Actors involved in cooperation can create shared approach about their clients or groups of clients etc. through co-production. Co-production may also encourage organizations to create pooled resources around the needs of the clients (Bovaird et. al., 2014; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013)	If there are no leadership resources available for coordinating inter-organizational cooperation, a barrier of structural holes in service processes might appear (Burt, 2001; Tuurnas et al., 2015)
Complementary resources & capabilities (and their interdependence)	The synergy-sensitive resources of each partner can be understood as resources that create more value put together compared to if the resource stands alone. The interdependence between partner resources can – in theory – be <i>pooled, sequential or reciprocal</i> .	Professionals can learn from experiences of others to utilize co-production in new ways due to various professional backgrounds, expertise and experience (Tuurnas, 2015; Mortensen et al., 2020)	Synergy can potentially also lead to value co-destruction if and as value is understood in conflicting ways among partners (Rossi & Tuurnas, 2019).
Relational-specific assets	The physical assets required to coordinate information across administrative and organizational boundaries, for example information technology, shared database systems, and/or physical locations.	The so called ‘issue arenas’ as virtual or tangible surrounding can help participants create shared meanings (Luomaaho & Vos, 2010). This is essential for creating effective co-production in the clients’ or citizens’ sphere.	In co-production, the physical assets concerning information access and ability to have a voice should also concern the citizens or clients as co-producers. Therefore, suitable and multifold co-production arenas should be carefully planned (Brix et al., 2020; Tuurnas, 2020). However, data protection issues might create barrier in this respect (Tuurnas, 2020; Tuurnas et al., 2014, Bellamy, 2009)
Knowledge-sharing routines	A regular pattern of interaction between partners that enables the transfer of information, the recombination or knowledge, or the creation of specialized knowledge.	Regular patterns of interaction reflect to institutionalizing co-production (i.e. moving one step further from co-production experiments; creating routines for sharing information etc.; Tuurnas, 2015)	If co-production is utilized only as experiments, pilots and through projects, the benefits of knowledge routines –that take time to be built may remain superficial. Data protection and various IT-systems across organizations may be problematic (Tuurnas, 2015; Tuurnas et al., 2014).

Source: Authors’ own development

4. CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in this study, the connection between interorganizational learning and -relationships to the co-production body of knowledge represents an important topic that increasingly will play a more crucial role for creating successful outcomes of co-production (Brix et al., 2020). To advance current understanding about these connections, a conceptual model was created. The model construe various components of interorganizational relationships, the need for interorganizational learning, and the impacts on co-production. As shown in Table 2, the four components that need to be in place to enable co-exploration and co-exploitation across administrative and organizational boundaries are: *'Effective governance'*, *'Complementary resources & capabilities' (and their interdependence)*, *'Relational-specific assets'* and *'Knowledge-sharing routines'*. In other words, the conceptual model allows professional co-producers to create, analyze and improve the inter-organizational opportunity space for co-production and the various advantages and barriers for co-production that can be found in such analysis. As part of this approach to this analytical work to co-exploration and co-exploitation, the conceptual model can be used for studying co-production from institutional and organizational perspectives. The model also underlines the important role of the professionals, as they are the ones creating and implementing different opportunity spaces for co-production in their everyday work in client and citizen encounters. Moreover, our study suggests that the interconnected environment in which co-production relations take place move beyond the nexus of the citizen-public service professional interface. Instead, interfaces take place in various 'task environments' of individual professionals, collectives of professionals and the citizens (Tuurnas, 2016; Verschuere et al., 2012).

Practitioners can also utilize the typology created here, as they are planning different co-production models, as it quite extensively brings out the essential components for effective and sustainable co-production from organisational point of view. Our study can help practitioners understand and consider various aspects related to coordination, knowledge management, platforms as well as potential legal constrictions (here, especially data management), that all may either play an advancing or hindering role in co-production.

REFERENCES

Aalborg Aktiv (n.d.). LAD DRØMMEN ARBEJDE. Retrieved March 17, 2020, from Aalborg Aktiv website: <https://www.aalborgaktiv.dk/>

Abma, T. A. & Noordegraaf, M. (2003). Public managers amidst ambiguity: Towards a typology of evaluative practices in public management. *Evaluation*, 9(3), 285–305.

Alford, J. (2014). The Multiple Facets of Co-Production: Building on the Work of Elinor Ostrom. *Public Management Review*, 16(3), 299-316.

Anand, A., Kringelum, L B., Madsen, C. O., & Selivanovskikh, L. (2020) “Interorganizational Learning: A Bibliometric Review and Research Agenda”. *The Learning Organization*, Ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-02-2020-0023>

Bellamy, C. (2009). Managing ICTs in public sector organizations. In T. Bovaird & E. Löffler (Eds.), *Public Management and Governance* (pp.135-151). Second edition. Routledge

Blomberg, M. & Waks, C. (2015). Coping with Contradictions: Hybrid Professionals Managing Institutional Complexity. *Journal of Professions and Organization*, 2(1), 78-102.

Bovaird, T. (2007). Beyond engagement and participation: User and community co-production of public services. *Public Administration Review*, 67(45), 846–860.

Bovaird, T., Briggs I., & Willis, M. (2014). Strategic Commissioning in the UK: Service Improvement Cycle or Just Going Round in Circles?. *Local Government Studies*, 40(4), 533-559.

Bovaird, T. & Löffler, E. (2012). From engagement to co-production: How users and communities contribute to public services. *Voluntas*, 23(4), 1119–1138.

Boyle, D., & Harris, M. (2009). *The challenge of co-production*. London: new economics foundation, 185-194.

Branden, T. & Honingh, M. (2013). Professionals and shifts in governance. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 36(12), 876–883.

Branden, T., Verschuere, B., & Steen, T. (Eds.). (2018). *Co-production and co-creation: Engaging citizens in public services*. Routledge.

Brix, J. (2019). Innovation capacity building: an approach to maintaining balance between exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *The Learning Organization*, 26(1), 12-26.

Brix, J., Krogstrup, H.K & Mortensen, N.M. (2020). Evaluating the outcomes of co-production in local government. *Local Government Studies*, 46(2), 169-185.

Burt, R. (2001). Structural holes versus network closure as social capital. In N. Lin, K. Cook, & R. Burt (Eds.), *Social capital: Theory and research* (pp. 31–56). New York, NY: Aldine R. Gruyter.

Das, T. K., & Teng, B. S. (1998). Between trust and control: Developing confidence in partner cooperation in alliances. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(3), 491-512.

Dyer, J. H., & Singh, H. (1998). The relational view: Cooperative strategy and sources of interorganizational competitive advantage. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(4), 660-679.

Dyer, J. H., Singh, H., & Hesterly, W. S. (2018). The relational view revisited: A dynamic perspective on value creation and value capture. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(12), 3140-3162.

Ewert, B. & Evers, A. (2012). Co-Production. Contested Meanings and Challenges for User Organizations. In Pestoff, V., T. Brandsen and B. Verschuere (Eds.), *New Public Governance, the Third Sector and Co-Production*, 61–78. New York and London: Routledge.

Fledderus, J., Brandsen, T., & Honingh, M. (2014). Restoring trust through the co-production of public services: A theoretical elaboration. *Public Management Review*, 16(3), 424-443.

Holmqvist, M. (2003). A dynamic model of intra-and interorganizational learning. *Organization Studies*, 24(1), 95-123.

Holmqvist, M. (2004). Experiential learning processes of exploitation and exploration within and between organizations: An empirical study of product development. *Organization Science*: 15(1), 70-81.

Huxham, C., & Vangen, S. (2013). *Managing to collaborate: The theory and practice of collaborative advantage*. Routledge.

Jaspers, S. & Steen, T. (2019). Realizing public values: enhancement or obstruction? Exploring value tensions and coping strategies in the co-production of social care, *Public Management Review*, 21(4), 606–627.

Jones, O., & Macpherson, A. (2006). Inter-organizational learning and strategic renewal in SMEs: extending the 4I framework. *Long Range Planning*, 39(2), 155-175.

Krogstrup, H. K., & Brix, J. (2019). *Co-produktion i den offentlige sektor: Brugerinvolvering i kvalitetsudvikling*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Lane, P. J., & Lubatkin, M. (1998). Relative absorptive capacity and interorganizational learning. *Strategic Management Journal*, 19(5), 461-477.

Larsson, R., Bengtsson, L., Henriksson, K., & Sparks, J. (1998). The interorganizational learning dilemma: Collective knowledge development in strategic alliances. *Organization Science*, 9(3), 285-305.

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. United States: Russell Sage Foundation.

Luoma-aho, V. & Vos, (2010). Towards a more dynamic stakeholder model: Acknowledging multiple issue arenas. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 15(3), 1-31.

Mandell, M., & Keast, R. L. (2008). Voluntary and community sector partnerships: current inter-organizational relations and future challenges. In Cropper, S., Ebers, M., Huxham, C. & Ring, P.S. (Eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations* (pp. 175-202). Oxford University Press.

Mortensen, N. M., (2018). How the City of Aalborg in Denmark reduces social isolation of people with learning disabilities. Published on 18/12/2018 on <https://inlogov.com/page/7/> Retrieved March 17, 2020.

Mortensen, N. M., (2020). The challenges of translating and implementing co-production in care services – A Danish case study. Unpublished PhD thesis. Aalborg University.

Mortensen, N. M., Brix, J., & Krogstrup, H. K. (2020). Reshaping the traditional roles of public agency: from public servants to co-producers. In H. Dickinson & H. Sullivan (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of the Public Servant*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Moynihan, D. P. & Thomas, J. C. (2013). Citizen, Customer, Partner: Rethinking the Place of the Public in Public Management. *Public Administration Review*, 73(6), 786–796.

Noordegraaf, M. (2015). Hybrid Professionalism and beyond: (New) Forms of Public Professionalism in changing Organizational and Societal Contexts. *Journal of Professions and Organization*, 2(2), 187-206.

Parmigiani, A., & Rivera-Santos, M. (2011). Clearing a path through the forest: A meta-review of interorganizational relationships. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1108-1136.

Peronard, J. P., & Brix, J. (2019). Organizing for inter-organizational learning in service networks. *The Learning Organization*, 26(3), 276-288.

Pestoff, V. (2018). *Co-production and Public Service Management: Citizenship, Governance and Public Services Management*. Routledge.

Ring, P. S., & Van de Ven, A. H. (1994). Developmental processes of cooperative interorganizational relationships. *Academy of Management Review*, 19(1), 90-118.

Rossi, P., & Tuurnas, S. (2019). Conflicts fostering understanding of value co-creation and service systems transformation in complex public service systems. *Public Management Review*, 1-22.

OECD. (2011). Together for better public services: Partnering with citizens and civil society. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264118843-en> (last accessed 1.3.2018)

Osborne, S. P. (2010). The new public governance. *Emerging Perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance*, 1.

Osborne, S. & Strokosch, K. (2013). It takes two to tango? Understanding the co-production of public services by integrating the services management and public administration perspectives. *British Journal of Management*, 24, 31–47.

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

Poocharoen, O. O., & Ting, B. (2015). Collaboration, co-production, networks: Convergence of theories. *Public Management Review*, 17(4), 587-614.

Sandfort, J., & Milward, H. B. (2009). Collaborative service provision in the public sector. In Cropper, S., Ebers, M., Huxham, C. & Ring, P.S. (Eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations*, Oxford University Press.

Schulz, K. P., & Geithner, S. (2010). Between exchange and development: organizational learning in schools through inter-organizational networks. *The Learning Organization*, 17(1), 69-85.

Sehested, K. (2002). How New Public Management Reforms Challenge the Roles of Professionals. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 25(12), 1513–1537.

Steen, T., & Tuurnas, S. (2018). The roles of the professional in co-production and co-creation processes. In Taco Brandsen, Bram Verschuere and Trui Steen (Eds.) *Co-production and Co-creation: Engaging Citizens in Public Services*, New York: Routledge, pp. 80-92.

Sullivan, M. V. (2000). Medicine Under Threat: Professionalism and Professional Identity. *CJMI*, 162(5), 673–675.

Taylor, I. and Kelly, J. (2006). Professionals, Discretion and Public Sector Reform in the UK: Re-Visiting Lipsky. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 19(7), 629–642.

Tuurnas, S. (2015). Learning to co-produce? The perspective of public service professionals. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 28(7), 583–598.

Tuurnas, S. (2016). *The Professional Side of Co-Production*. Academic dissertation. Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 2163. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Tuurnas S., Stenvall J., & Rannisto P-H., (2016). The Impact of Co-production on Frontline Accountability - the Case of Conciliation. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 82(1), 131-149.

Tuurnas, S., Stenvall, J., Rannisto, P-H., Harisalo, R. & Hakari, K. (2014). Coordinating co-production in complex network settings. *European Journal of Social Work*, 18(3), 370–382.

Tuurnas, S. (2020). Skilling and motivating staff for co-production. In Löffler Elke & Bovaird Tony (eds.) *Palgrave Handbook on Co-production*, publication 8/2020.

Van den Oever, K. & Martin, X. (2019). Fishing in troubled waters? Strategic decision-making and value creation and appropriation from partnerships between public organizations, *Strategic Management Journal*, 40(4), 580-603.

Vanleene, D. (2020). (VULNER)ABILITY. Engaging with Citizen Co-producers in Community Development, Academic dissertation, Ghent University.

Verschuere, B., Brandsen, T. and Pestoff, V. (2012). Co-Production: The State of the Art in Research and the Future Agenda. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 23(4), 1083–1101.

Williams, S. J., & Caley, L. (2020). *Improving Healthcare Services Coproduction, Codesign and Operations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Co-Exploration and Co-Exploitation: Co-Exploration is when members from different organizations search for new ideas and opportunities together. Co-Exploitation is when members from different organizations help each other to become more efficient and/or effective when co-producing the service to or with the citizens/users/end-users.

Co-Production: (*type in something short and brilliant that captures both the inter-organizational view AND the citizen-view*)

Collaborative Governance: A paradigm in public sector management in which different organizational actors are expected to collaborate to deliver public services to – or co-produce these services with citizens and/or (end)users.

Inter-Organizational Learning: Concerns the processes of how members from different organizations collaborate and communicate to both create new knowledge together and to learn from each other in processes of transferring already existing, explicit knowledge between one another.

Inter-Organizational Relationships: Concerns the different types of collaboration between different organizations and how varied interface strategies enable the expected outputs and outcomes of such collaborations.

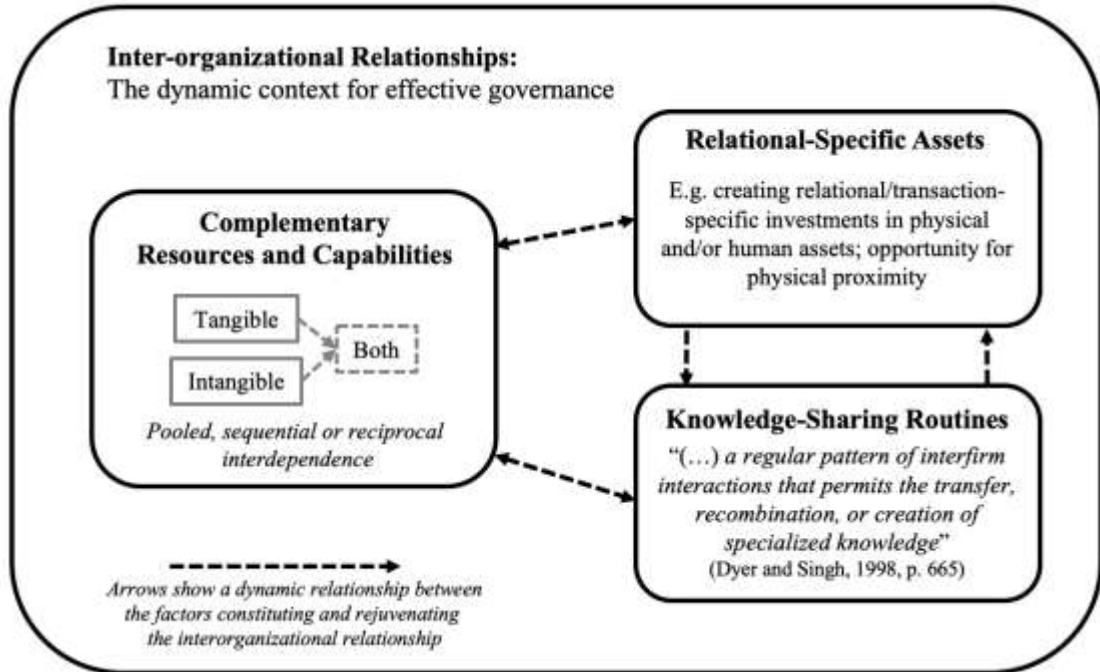
Accepted for:

Thomassen, A.O. and Jensen, J.B. (2021)

Processual Perspectives on the Co-Production Turn in Public Sector Organizations, IGI Global, USA, pp.000-000.

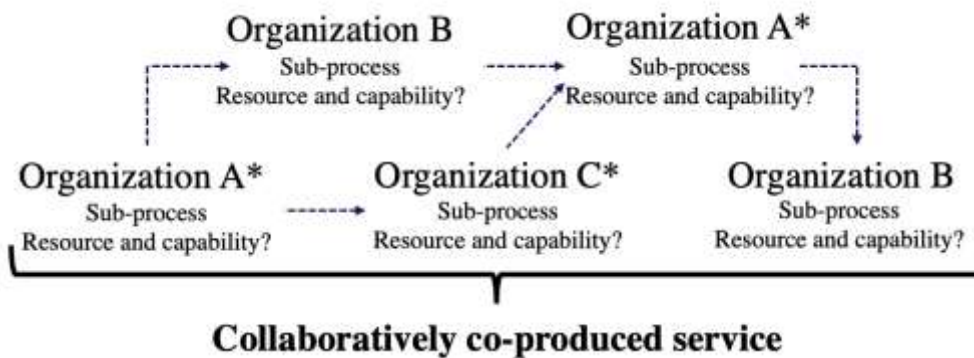
...TABLES & FIGURES...

Figure 1: A conceptual model of learning in inter-organizational relationships



Source: Authors' own development

Figure 2: An example of a generic service mapping for collaborative co-production



Source: Authors' own development