

Leading for public value in multi-agency collaboration

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between leadership and public value in a multi-agency service, requiring the delicate navigation of tensions when there are diverse and competing interests among public service collaborators. The paper adopts an actor-focused perspective arguing for the need to develop theory about leadership in collaborative settings which includes understanding political astuteness in leadership, as this can have an impact on whether or not public value is created. The setting is a multi-agency service hub and the empirical research is based on interviews and document analysis. The paper makes two contributions: first, it analyses the pluralistic leadership processes exercised in the pursuit of public value; secondly, it identifies how political astuteness is a key capability in leading diverse interest in cross-organisational collaborations.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership and public value are increasingly discussed in the public administration and management literatures, but the link between them is under-researched and under-theorised (Hartley et al, 2019b). This paper examines how leadership contributes to public value creation in multi-agency collaboration guided by the research question: How does leadership support public value creation in multi-agency settings with diverse and competing interests? The paper examines this question through the empirical study of a service for victims of crime, where varied agencies co-located in a shared office space with the aims of improving communication and collaborating to enhance service delivery.

The research setting is a UK multi-agency victim support hub in the west of the UK, where practitioners work collaboratively in an open plan office to undertake joint work, share information and thereby to aim to enhance service provision. This move towards multi-agency collaboration was initiated following the first elections of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in 2012. Under this governance arrangement, local elected leaders are responsible for the oversight of policing in a geographical area (Hall, 2018).

Collaboration is defined as activity where stakeholders from different organisations work

together to provide co-ordination and seamlessness, to identify solutions to social issues that cannot be tackled by the organisations acting alone (Huxham and Vangen, 2013).

A multi-agency service is a rich and informative setting for the analysis of how public value is created within a strategically agreed collaboration where leaders converge on a clear proposition (Moore, 1995) to guide their strategy and practice. Furthermore, the setting of a multi-agency hub provides a useful lens to investigate leadership and public value, in contrast with cases that focus on wider networks (see Bryson et al, 2017; Hartley et al, 2019a). This is important as partners and their leaders require a degree of sharing of goals to guide service development. In a hub setting, public value will be sought through developing a collective understanding of the most appropriate outcomes to help citizens, in this case victims. This will be supported by service ‘assessment pathways’, and, additionally, public value is intended to result from improved communication between the agencies involved. However, with the diverse and competing interests involved, the public value proposition may at times be interpreted differently by partners, or even contested and competed over.

The paper makes two contributions: First, it explores how pluralistic leadership contributes to public value in partnerships, and how this leadership is exercised to navigate the tensions which can arise between multi-agency partners in the pursuit of public value. Second, it adds to the understanding of how political astuteness contributes to understanding the link between leadership and public value in multi-agency partnerships. Importantly, in a partnership setting, political astuteness skills are valuable in managing higher-level strategic and political activities, as well as some of the skills required to work in the small-scale setting of a victim support hub.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we consider the literature on leadership, exploring its connection to public value. This includes an examination of plural leadership (Sergi et al, 2016) and leadership with political astuteness (Hartley, 2017). Some literature on public value is then reviewed highlighting Benington’s (2011) two dimensions of public value, which, it is argued, can enhance the study of public value and leadership. The second section introduces the research design and methodology. Third, the findings are critically presented, followed by the discussion which considers leadership, political astuteness and public value and the connections between them. The paper concludes by emphasising the contribution of the paper and sketches a future research agenda.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Leadership

Leadership remains under-researched in relation to public value with less empirical work than is sometimes assumed (Hartley et al, 2019b). Informing this agenda is a growing literature about leadership in collaborative settings (e.g. Huxham and Vangen, 2013; Crosby and Bryson, 2005). For Crosby and Bryson (2018: 1266) public leadership is ‘a collective, multilevel, cross sector endeavour imbued with public value’. This recognises that leadership does not always involve singular leaders (Alvesson and Spicer, 2011). Increasingly, the literature assumes shared (Pearce and Conger, 2003; Bligh et al, 2006) or distributed leadership (Spillane 2005; Bolden, 2011) reflecting the complexities of a ‘no-one-in-charge, shared-power world’ (Crosby and Bryson, 2005: 8). Denis et al (2010) and Sergi et al (2016) emphasize pluralistic forms of leadership, which may come about for a variety of reasons.

Although distributed leadership in networks and partnerships is widely discussed, few studies consider it in detail (Hartley, 2018). Such plural theories of leadership have been labelled ‘post-heroic’ (Sergi et al, 2016; Crosby and Bryson, 2018), describing the aspiration to move analytically beyond the commonly understood definition of singular leaders. Emphasising the importance of leadership by collectives, Sergi et al (2016) identify variations in defining plural leadership - an important ‘umbrella term’, but one that is not clearly defined (Sergi et al, 2016: 36). They argue that there are three perspectives to plural leadership: pluralising by choice to ensure that complex organisations or collaborations function effectively; pluralising by ideal, with attention to promoting democratic ideals; and pluralising to assist analytical understanding of leadership processes that emerge out of joint action. This paper is concerned with the first perspective.

The literature on multi-agency collaboration enhances our understanding of leadership (e.g. Huxham and Vangen, 2013; Cristofoli, 2017). Issues include the requirement for trust amongst partners (Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Klijn et al, 2010), frameworks for agreeing shared goals (Vangen and Huxham, 2012), and the complex institutional interests and power dynamics (Cornforth et al, 2018).

In multi-agency settings, leadership may be required to provide a sense of shared purpose and sense-making across disparate interests. Whilst multi-agency working between organisations is often associated with pluralistic leadership this is not inevitable. There are situations where collaboration is undertaken with singular leadership drawing together different stakeholders, or in cross-sectoral initiatives where a clear command structure is valuable. In these contexts, leadership may be granted by stakeholders to those with access to critical resources and the ability to direct them towards solving problems (Weber and Khademian, 2008; Dudau et al, 2018).

There has been a small number of attempts to consider the relationship between public value and collaboration. Page et al (2015) argue when engaging in collaborative activities ‘democratic accountability’ is important for creating public value. This is because it can be applied vertically to provide responsiveness to authorisers and legal mandates, as well as horizontally to collaborative partners and external stakeholders. Second, ‘procedural legitimacy’ is key to creating public value as it improves the likelihood that collaborations are conducted effectively. Page et al’s final dimension is ‘substantive outcomes’ by which a collaboration creates public value which is demonstrable and effective.

Another stream of literature focuses specifically on multidisciplinary services (Frost et al, 2005; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2018). For Frost et al, (2005), multi-agency teams may include stages of joint working: ‘co-operation’ (working together but maintaining independence); ‘collaboration’ (services planning together); ‘co-ordination’ (working together systematically); and ‘merger and integration’ (when teams and professionals become a single service. By working together professionals are likely to influence each other’s beliefs and practices, but with disparities of power and status (Frost et al., 2005; Sullivan and Williams, 2012).

For Keast, Brown and Mandell (2007) and Keast and Mandell (2012), the integration required to tackle and improve social problems jointly is described as including cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. First, cooperation is the agreement to share information, office space or referrals, but with organisations remaining independent. Second, coordination suggests increasingly formal links informed by shared objectives, leading to a more enduring relationship. Thirdly, collaboration is usually the basis for the most stable and long-term

relationships, with the organisations recognising they are dependent on each other. They state that although the three terms can be used interchangeably, they are also analytically distinct.

Furthermore, leadership can manifest differently in partnership settings. Dudau (2009) investigated a UK Local Safeguarding Children's Board, discussing difficulties for public organisations providing leadership in inter-professional and multi-agency settings. She notes that leadership in partnerships will include various expressions of leadership. She argues that although the leadership literature has typically referred to the leadership of people, in joined-up government initiatives, focus is also required on the leadership of partnership and collaborative governance processes, as well as front-line multi-sector service delivery.

While some important aspects of pluralistic leadership have been addressed in the extant literature, an important question remains. The public value literature has surprisingly little to say on this topic beyond broad and general statements (Hartley et al, 2019a). Ayres (2019) discusses soft metagovernance - an informal way of governing using relational leadership - arguing that it can contribute to public value creation and suggesting that managers use it as a part of their leadership armoury (p15). In a recent study of public value and policing, Hartley et al (2019a) examined how a police service led the creation of public value by collaborating with different publics in spaces of contest and conflict. In these contexts, it is imperative that leaders use their skills to harness the perspectives of different stakeholders to create public value from diverse interests.

In addition to leadership, this paper examines how political astuteness provides insight into the link between leadership and public value. Political astuteness involves leaders using political capabilities (skills, abilities, knowledge, and judgments) in situations with diverse and sometimes competing interests (Hartley et al. 2015). Hartley and Fletcher (2008) identified five dimensions of leadership with political astuteness: *personal skills* and self-awareness of one's own motives and behaviours; *interpersonal skills* including 'soft' skills, and the ability to influence stakeholders; *reading people and situations*, by recognising the different interests of people and organisations; *building alignment and alliances* to forge collaborative action; and *strategic direction and scanning*, requiring strategic long-term thinking and action. Political skills are valuable in navigating the complexity of different organisations working together (Crosby and Bryson, 2005).

Increasingly, academic theory points to leadership with political astuteness being deployed

constructively for social and organisational purposes (Waring et al, 2018; Buchanan, 2008; Hartley et al, 2015). Hartley et al (2019b) argue that political astuteness provides the key concept which links leadership and public value. This is because public value and leadership both have to address competing interests amongst multiple stakeholders. Political astuteness augments the capability of actors to navigate various interests, involving ‘small p’ as well as ‘big P’ politics, including in the workplace as much as in formal political systems. This may be important in a multi-agency hub where there are leaders with formal organisational authority (based on position) but who may need to exercise influence beyond the bounds of their organisation with their collaborators from different organisations as well as with other stakeholders.

Public Value

One way to examine how leadership contributes to the value achieved in a public service initiative is through the framework of public value. There has been significant theoretical work on public value since Moore’s book (1995) and the literature abounds with different definitions (Hartley et al, 2017).

Moore (1995) focused on how public managers create value through the activities they plan and orchestrate. He argued that to be effective, public organisations, require firstly a public value proposition, or vision, of the value they wish to create. Secondly, this proposition will require a mandate derived from the ‘authorising environment’. Thirdly, a public organisation needs operational capacity - influence over resources (inside or outside the organisation) to progress the public value proposition.

Benington (2011) further developed the concept of public value by suggesting that it can be analysed using two dimensions. The first is ‘what the public values’, challenging traditional approaches to public administration with a shift from producer-led to include user- or citizen-informed models of public services (Benington, 2011: 42). This requires judgement of what value means and who benefits, recognising that what the public values may be different from what the public desires. The second dimension is ‘what adds value to the public sphere’, for present and future generations so this goes beyond what the public themselves value. In later manifestations of public value theory, (Benington, 2011; Bryson et al 2017), public

value is not created and sustained by the public sector alone, but includes other sectors, encompassing the public and private sectors, and civil society including non-governmental organisations and citizens.

Studying public value is insightful in multi-agency settings. Scholars have explored public value creation involving not only public managers, but actors from different sectors (Crosby et al, 2017; Bryson, et al, 2017). This is because a wide range of actors may engage in public value creation in a ‘polycentric, multi-nodal, multi-sector, multi-level, multi-actor, multi-logic, multi-media, multi-practice place characterised by complexity, dynamism, uncertainty, and ambiguity’ (Bryson et al, 2017: 641). Investigating the (co-) creation of public value has also expanded the focus from single organisations to settings where multiple stakeholders co-create public value (Sancino et al 2018).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The relationship between leadership, political astuteness and public value creation is examined through an empirical case study of a multi-agency hub for victims of crime in the west of the UK. Case study research is valuable for exploring complex issues, where a variety of stakeholders are involved (Yin, 2014) and is useful for illustrating a theory in detail to provide inspiration for new ideas where limited theoretical knowledge exists (Siggelkow, 2007). For these reasons, we argue a case study contributes to analysing the relationship between leadership and public value.

The case study used the co-research method (Hartley and Benington, 2000), using an insider/outsider team (Bartunek and Louis, 1996), a research team combining academic and practitioner knowledge, skills and expertise. The research team combined academics and practitioners by drawing on their varied skills in a systematic way. Co-research in this case involved a police officer experienced in working with victims of crime who was seconded to and trained up for the research project but who did not know this particular force or hub.

The partners in the hub included staff from public and voluntary organisations engaged in strategic partnership working and multi-agency service delivery. The case involved a purposive sample of 13 interviews with subjects who were representative of, and expert in, the different areas of service delivery in the hub. The interviews were conducted with people

who had previously implemented, or currently worked in the hub (along with one user). The semi-structured interviews provided flexibility to investigate additional themes in addition to the research schedule (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). PCC strategies and planning documents describing the history of the project were read to prepare the interview questions and provided context.

The interviewees included representatives of the project management team who had initiated the hub, including a senior police officer and an officer in the PCC. Current members of the hub interviewed were managers and practitioners from Victim Support (lead agency), a voluntary sector LBGT+ worker, a National Health Service (NHS) mental health practitioner, and the hub co-ordinator. Interviews were conducted with three police officers who referred victims to the hub. One service user agreed to be interviewed.

Leadership and public value were explored through questions about hub practices, including the contribution to the local community, and the benefits and detriments of a multi-agency hub model. This is in line with Benington's (2011) view of public value as involving trade-offs in priorities. Most interviews were conducted with two researchers present, but four interviews took place by telephone with one researcher. All face-to-face interviews were digitally recorded, with notes taken contemporaneously for telephone interviews.

The analysis was informed by Gioia et al's three stage framework (2013) for seeking qualitative rigour in inductive research. We used their work as a heuristic device to provide a phased approach to analysis. The first order concepts (e.g. on the purpose of the hub and leadership) were informed by the interview questions and raw data. In the second analysis phase, a smaller number of second order themes (e.g. types of leadership and leading public value creation) were augmented by new concepts arising from the interviews. Finally, the second order themes were combined into three aggregate dimensions (collaboration (multi-agency approach), public value, and leadership with political astuteness) informing the headings in the key findings. Although standalone, each heading contributes to answering our research question. The full coding schema is also reproduced in Appendix 1.

The study is informed by retrospective reporting about the initiation and early implementation of the hub, but primarily concentrates on actual practices and processes of leadership and public value in the hub at the time of the research.

FINDINGS

Case Study Context

Case studies are embedded in and informed by context, so we describe the local environment where the hub operated. The locality has a population of over 500,000 people, covering an area of 600 square miles. It is composed of several distinct localities, some with substantial levels of deprivation. The area has predominantly white residents, apart from a city with a small ethnic minority population and a younger demographic.

Before the hub was established, crime victims were contacted by a voluntary agency called Victim Support, which assessed the person's needs and made a referral to other agencies. In 2012 the role of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), elected by citizens for each police force, was introduced in the UK. This brought considerable change to providing victim services, in part because responsibility for funding shifted to PCCs from police authorities that previously oversaw police forces. New commissioning powers for PCCs meant there was scope for local variation across police force areas and involving other specialist services.

Multi-agency Approach

In the case study, the PCC had recognised that changes in governance provided an opportunity to make services more co-ordinated. He was reported to have developed a vision of *'a lot more agencies involved under one roof This is good as they know the right agency to go to when the referral goes in and that it goes to the right team'* (Police Officer).

Victim Support remained the lead agency and was the largest contributor of staff. The PCC office believed that involving other statutory and third-sector organisations and working in a different way could improve victims' lives and so the idea of the hub was born:

'We started looking around at where partnerships could streamline some of the services and an obvious place to start was to sit down with each other and talk about what services could be given to a victim' (PCC Officer).

A project manager was appointed with responsibility for strategic development of the hub. Premises were found and the agencies expanded to include Victim Support; hate crime

support; an older people's worker; a young persons' worker; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender support; witness care; and an NHS mental health worker. As lead agency, Victim Support was responsible for initial contact with victims to conduct an assessment. If it was thought a victim would benefit with contact from a partner agency, they were referred to the appropriate hub worker. Issues of practices, responsibility and accountability arose with several agencies in one location, each retaining their own management.

To facilitate the new model, the role of hub co-ordinator was created to provide leadership across agencies but without direct responsibility for staff. She was responsible for ensuring partners collaborated effectively, and in this sense the co-ordinator was a singular leader fostering a shared culture across the agencies involved. The co-ordinator aimed to influence inter-organisational and cross-sector collaboration, through interactions and practices between herself and the managers in the many other agencies as well as the hub workers. Her role was important for how she formulated and marshalled the public value proposition in the hub, and she worked positively with partners to ensure the aims of the service were achieved.

Dynamics of Public Value in the Multi-agency Hub

Before reporting the findings on leadership, it is useful to analyse the dynamics of public value creation in the hub. This was rooted in the PCC's vision to co-locate professionals in a shared office, using a shared referral pathways and improving communication amongst the different agencies.

An example of the link between the public value proposition and practice 'on the ground' was the case of an elderly person called 'D', a victim of a £40,000 fraud. The impact on D was financial, physical and emotional, leading to a loss of self-confidence and increased isolation. After a referral was made to the Victim Support about him, it was then signposted to the older people's service within the hub and an older people's worker visited him at home. Recognising his own vulnerabilities, D said that the worker:

*'...put me in touch with an agency called Care and Repair, they came to the house and did a survey of the house and made recommendations for things that could help'
(D' Victim).*

Adaptations were made to his house and a benefits advisor helped secure financial support and a disabled parking permit. Although the initial contact with D was as a victim, the hub worker had noticed not only his victim status but his broader vulnerability - so she worked on other aspects of his life, both to help his well-being and also to make him less vulnerable to future crime. He stated he felt safer and was able to go out again:

'she (Hub worker) has been absolutely brilliant...if they hadn't got involved I don't know where I'd be' ('D' Victim).

With support from the hub, D reported his depression had lifted, he was more active, and he went out shopping. Preventing problems is a good indicator of public value, though this can be hard to measure. However, because D continued to live independently (perhaps reducing pressure on the NHS and other services), D illustrates how prevention might conserve resources and therefore contribute additional public value.

As lead agency, Victim Support could sometimes involve friends and family directly as part of its service. This can be seen as public value creation (value being created through the community not just from public services) but where Victim Support were unable to assist, then hub workers still thought that hub services had enhanced wider public value:

'The knock-on effect of the service we offer is that their family and friends benefit' (Hub Worker).

'Everybody benefits, as if they can use the hub this helps from a preventative level and will help the health service further down the line' (Police Officer).

Public value was also added through the reassurance provided by a well-managed and caring assessment process, which included the value created through victims being listened to, even if they did not require any further service or aid:

'...if victims feel down they can chat to us....the main thing is when something happens we are there...we underplay the value of a listening service' (Hub Worker).

This was an example of how the hub public value proposition was not just the aspiration to improve victims' lives as a final outcome, but also how value was created through assessment processes.

In other cases, practical measures provided wider benefits, such as for a boy who was assaulted and had his bike stolen, with another one purchased for him by the hub so that he could get to school. This had '*...an impact on the family as it's helped the boy to get to school*' (Hub Worker).

In our analysis, the public value creation that emerged from the hub suggested wider benefits for society. A manager thought benefit was added over different time periods:

'...in the short term the victims of crime benefit in the area e.g. the emotional benefit. In the medium term, local services benefit from our approach, but also friends and family. At the widest level value for society because of budgetary savings' (Hub Service Manager).

Furthermore, public value articulated as 'what the public values' can be understood as service users' views on the main priorities for a service. In the case study, it was stated that the service users' views were mainly collected through surveys and performance indicators

'They report back through a survey - we identify several goals for a client to achieve' (Hub Worker).

There was less focus on collecting views from focus groups, for example, but it was thought that working on a needs assessment with a victim could also be an example of understanding what the public values.

Leadership in the Hub

What leadership processes contributed to this multi-agency initiative? Several interviewees identified that it was the first elected PCC who had demonstrated initial leadership, by developing and implementing the hub idea. He had held formal authority and was responsible for the funding, but for the project to be successful he had to achieve 'buy-in' from other

stakeholders by engendering a belief that the idea was feasible. According to several respondents, the PCC recognised the opportunity to develop and change the service, focused on improving outcomes for victims. This required not only a vision of a public value outcome, but also the leadership capabilities of political astuteness.

His leadership was outcome-focused, which is consistent with a public value approach. This former PCC had been a senior police officer prior to becoming PCC and it seems likely that his experience helped to shape his vision and desire to improve the service. He had exercised an influential role in shaping the new initiative:

'(we) had to change practices in order to meet what the PCC wanted' (Co-ordinator).

Furthermore, the current head of policy in the PCC office had displayed an imaginative approach to policing and the wider policy context. At the time of setting up the hub, victim satisfaction was low and the idea of a new hub model had been well received. He wanted to shape the hub so that agencies concentrated on shared outcomes rather than thinking only about their own priorities.

Leadership by the PCC and his office focused not only on creating substantial change by bringing together different agencies as multi-agency partners, but also setting up new structures and roles and lines of accountability. Much organisational change seems to need both transformational and transactional leadership (Hartley and Benington, 2010) and this approach aimed to focus on success but also the management of the detail a 'tight ship' within this wider policy context.

Finally, the hub co-ordinator (specifically employed to provide leadership but without direct responsibility for staff) provided a flexibility of leadership approach to ensure the hub remained victim focused when there were tensions between workers from the different agencies. She stated:

'I believe that I can talk to people in a way that allows me to challenge them without it becoming confrontational' (Co-ordinator).

At times there had been tensions about different interpretations of hub processes and sharing resources. To ensure the hub concentrated on its priorities, the co-ordinator was reported to be inclusive in how she dealt with problems and used good listening skills. She also

challenged colleagues to ensure that smaller day-to-day issues did not become a barrier to service delivery.

Leadership with Political Astuteness

Interviewees reported that the first PCC had led with astuteness because he outlined a clear vision for redesigning victim services in the face of different agency perspectives about how victim services could be provided. The PCC exercised leadership and held power through both legitimate authority including controlling the budget, but for the project to be a success he had to engender a degree of consensus amongst potential partners with their disparate views and values.

The PCC officer said that agencies in the hub (or potential partners) sometimes competed as well as collaborated. He thought political astuteness was about being mindful of this when communicating with them:

'Partnership working can be a chess gamewe don't have the funding issues that many of the organisations have where they may be competing for the same pot of money. We have nothing to gain other than caution' (PCC Officer).

Although it is inevitable there will be tensions when planning multi-agency initiatives, he needed to ensure that the public value proposition was not lost or undermined.

Leadership with political astuteness was also exercised by the hub co-ordinator, who, with no direct line management for most staff (other than those in her own agency), had to work beyond formal authority. She exercised leadership through influence and this involved political astuteness by being aware of different interests and forging consensus to achieve valuable outcomes. There were some key capabilities here which enhanced sensitivity in being a new leader (for that team) but without formal authority:

'[You] recognise that you have to adapt by learning about those you are working with and tailoring my response in order to influence them' (Co-ordinator).

The co-ordinator was mindful of the limits of her formal authority making changes involving staff from the different agencies. She sensitively tackled what might appear trivial but which had risked unsettling this collaborative project, for example, policies about staff being allowed to eat at their desks or their different working hours and pay grades. In a small,

shared space, such differences were visible and irritating, requiring tact and diplomacy by the coordinator to address.

The co-ordinator remarked that sometimes she wanted to change people's views, whereas at other times she sought buy-in to an existing situation. She added *'you have to be mindful of where you sit'*. This was both literal and figurative, indicating she was sensitive to aligning herself too closely with one partner over another, or appearing threatening. It was important to her that she did not show favouritism to one agency – this indicates astuteness requires constant attention to make subtle changes.

The co-ordinator emphasised that the hub remained victim-focused by 'pushing back' on certain restrictive organisational performance criteria, enabling sufficient autonomy for her own decision-making. Several interviewees stated she used the skills of listening and inclusiveness. Such communication with individual staff was essential, but her leadership also required an understanding of the multi-agency dynamics within the hub setting and at a wider strategic level. By working between the hub and the wider environment she was a translator of the public value proposition:

'We are changing the hub to be one service in its real sense of the word so therefore the needs assessment should contain all of the services we are able to offer'
(Co-ordinator).

Such comments demonstrated how the co-ordinator used political astuteness in a complex setting. She summarised her position as having a good understanding of the relationship between positional and personal power in the hub, and using this understanding to be effective.

However, there were limits to this approach. It was reported that referrals were not always passed to the relevant agencies in the hub as quickly as they could be. This was related to a particular manager which had created some tensions that the co-ordinator had had to follow up.

Finally, several interviewees claimed to have originated the hub, with comments such as *'It came out of my office'*, *'The PCC wanted this'*, *'It was my baby'*, *'I took hold of it'*. These may indicate a self-serving attribution bias (Arkin et al.,1980). Although different stakeholders asserted that they were the key driver for the venture, this may be indicative of

the shared leadership required. Either way, it is clear that psychological ‘ownership’ of the hub was widely distributed and this was likely to be helpful for its longer-term sustainability.

Leadership to Create Public Value

Leadership to create public value in the hub included not only strategy, but also operational management which enhanced collaboration. Leadership for public value creation where there are diverse and competing interests can be about handling delicate issues about relationships in a close working environment. The quality of the working relationships had an impact on the quality of service provided to victims.

The co-ordinator negotiated meanings between strategy and practice, with the requirement for her to focus not only on hub leadership, but also multi-agency collaboration and its processes. Positioned between the hub and the wider policy environment, she practised collective leadership and encouraged collaboration whilst acting as an interpreter and translator of public value:

‘She understands how we have to monitor victim satisfaction and we meet regularly on issues that affect both our agendas such as restorative justice and target hardening’ (PCC Officer).

‘The co-ordinator has always encouraged us to ensure we maintain contact with our employers’ (Hub Worker).

The co-ordinator navigated between hub partners by leading the adaptive challenge of providing victims’ services differently from the previous arrangement. This was appreciated by many interviewees, including one worker who thought the hub was ideal for sharing good practice:

‘...you can tell the co-ordinator about an approach that worked so you can embed it [...] if someone has identified a service then they will let others know about it and that is welcomed’ (Hub worker).

A hub worker stated that her agency line manager was at a geographical distance in a local city. This meant that it was inevitable that she worked more closely with the co-ordinator on a daily basis, using her own initiative whilst waiting for decisions from her main employer. Her funding came jointly from the charity that employed her and the hub, sometimes leaving her confused. She commented:

'My manager isn't based here but I work well with the co-ordinator and I would struggle without her' (Hub Worker).

Viewed from one perspective this type of matrix-management was associated with operationalising collective leadership. However, the co-ordinator's ability to do this whilst navigating amongst the various agencies involved also meant she provided leadership to enhance the creation of public value.

The leadership of public value might also be considered to facilitate the provision of wider benefits for society. In addition to the benefits for victims, it was stated that value might be created for other service providers (for example by reducing referrals to the NHS). Public value was created by victims regaining confidence to re-engage with society after an incident, or by providing resources (e.g. for a young person to attend school).

For instance, identifying underlying mental health issues may improve a person's life and contribute to their family and community. The financial benefits for society (which can be part of public value) were also articulated by one interviewee:

'If a victim can deliver outcomes for themselves, it is a good use of the taxpayers' money. The outcomes are improved or maintained health and wellbeing, feeling of safety and being aware of information and choices' (Co-ordinator).

Such benefits were reported to be spread wider than the immediate victim, and comments suggested an ability within the hub to think and act in systems terms, beyond organisational service silos.

Lastly, leadership to create public value was also proactive, which is important for the generation of public value. The PCC officer looked for policy opportunities to link the hub activities and user outcomes to wider government programmes:

'As a collective you look at how you may impact on an issue and it is interesting as to what comes up.....one agency may have the primacy on an issue but all must have an impact'. (PCC Officer).

Such proactivity was also evidenced by the agencies involved in the hub, with one manager stating how he worked with the previous and current hub co-ordinators strategically to sustain his organisation's involvement. This was, perhaps, an example of how leadership can connect different interests and stakeholders, aligning a project with a broader public policy landscape.

DISCUSSION

Building on the themes set out in the findings the discussion focuses on public value, leadership and with political astuteness in multi-agency settings where there are diverse and sometimes competing interests. This paper contributes to the wider literature by analysing pluralistic leadership and political astuteness in the pursuit of public value. While other papers have started to explore these links (e.g. Hartley et al, 2019a), this paper adds to the variety of contexts in which this can occur, by focusing on these issues in an interorganisational hub space, of small physical dimensions but considerable organisational complexity. We identify some key themes and the interrelationships between them.

Leadership in the Multi-agency Hub

The case study shows there were several different leaderships including plural leadership but also the singular leadership required to co-ordinate the diverse teams. Of course, singular and co-leadership are not easily divisible, as seen in emergency service responses which are often inter-organisationally collaborative, but which have a clear chain of command. In this case study, it is evident that although each of the agencies had their own separate leaders/managers, the co-ordinator exercised leadership by creating a degree of consensus to achieve shared goals, but without direct responsibility for staff.

Leadership was practiced by a diversity of actors who shared aspects of power, in roles in different contexts (Bryson et al, 2017). In the hub, the shared leadership involved the co-ordinator and the other managers, but this was not just about managing daily operations.

Although she held strong views about some aspects of the project, the co-ordinator had to work in the context of the original vision of the project envisaged by the PCC. Shared leadership was needed so that each manager was jointly committed to the 'buy-in' for service outcomes through changed arrangements. This required the ability to be politically astute to ensure the implementation of the public value proposition.

The aim to improve outcomes was experienced as positive and it might be thought that in a multi-agency hub there will inevitably be 'better' collaboration and shared leadership. However, this cannot be assumed since leading in a multi-agency setting calls for a wide range of leadership skills (Dudau 2009). In this case study, this included leading staff, leading a multi-agency service, as well as collaboration with wider strategic partnership arrangements. In the hub, such leadership stretched across operational and staff management, but also necessitated an understanding of the commissioning and procurement of services (Hall, 2018), and navigating the tensions involved in identifying resources to sustain the service in future.

Leadership was exercised within the context of a confined multi-agency office, where tensions could arise about conflicting aims and practices. The research on public value creation suggests the need for effective leadership to maintain a focus on the core proposition. The ability to identify and handle the various issues arising from joint working is a valuable skill of leadership. In particular, it was important that the co-ordinator navigated within the variants of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration that are central to partnership working (Keast, Brown and Mandell, 2007; Keast and Mandell, 2012).

Within this authority structure there were different interests, some focused on how collaboration benefits service users, but some interests which were organisational and which created tensions and challenges. For example, public value creation can be lost in a slow gradual chipping away as agencies try to survive financially as third-sector organisations. This is because they may be dependent on insecure state funding and voluntary donations in 'the complex network of statutory and non-statutory agencies, competing for funding with other providers in order to sustain and develop the services they provide' (Hall, 2018: 231).

In sum, the pursuit of public value in a multi-agency setting appears to benefit from plural leadership although some aspects of singular leadership are identifiable. The intricacy of such issues are emphasised by Hartley (2018) who notes that state actors are not the only

ones who can exercise public leadership on their own, but that in some settings they may do this in collaboration and contest with the public, private and voluntary sectors. Following Heifetz (1994) Hartley (2018) states that clarifying the purpose of leadership is essential, but not always easy, and that a core objective for leaders is to identify the key adaptive challenge in the situation and work to achieve it. In multi-agency contexts, leadership may be exercised at different levels and by different people, and this was identified in this study. Organisations may be motivated by different factors to pluralise their leadership, including for structural reasons, the desire to be normatively collaborative or even for idealistic reasons (Sergi et al, 2017). Leadership constellations seem particularly valuable in settings where there are diverse manifestations of leadership, including the coming together of political leadership, different professions and collaborations (Hartley, 2018). This will see leaders grappling with differing agendas in order to create a degree of shared vision and agreement, for which political astuteness appears to be valuable.

Leadership for Public Value with Political Astuteness

The multi-agency hub was considered by all interviewed to be a successful initiative, enabling a complex collaboration across diverse agencies. With the plurality of interests in a hub, it is valuable for leaders to use political astuteness to create some degree of alignment in order to progress these interests to create public value. In this study there was a plurality of interests, both from political and strategic perspectives, but also between the different agencies in their policies and practices. Leadership was not concerned with only leading a single team with a single set of aims and objectives but a diverse range of stakeholders. This requires a number of skills to practice leadership with political astuteness, including understanding strategic direction, interpersonal skills, and building alignment and alliances (Hartley and Fletcher, 2008).

The findings indicate that there were two uses of political astuteness in the hub. First, the historic ‘chess game’ that was required by the PCC to initiate the hub project. This was seen in the first PCC’s ability to identify a vision that drew together and incorporated a diversity of views. At that time, it was crucial that the project team collaborated effectively with partners to ensure buy-in to what the researchers have framed as the public value proposition. Second, the leader of the front-line delivery of a multi-agency service also exhibited political

astuteness. In the close-knit hub service, this was demonstrated in how the co-ordinator promoted the overall goal of service delivery, in order to keep the public value proposition on track. As Lazarus (1984) has argued, there may be small daily ‘hassles’ and ‘niggles’ for employees, in this case arising from co-location, so a leader will need to work sensitively amongst the different agencies to ensure these do not become a risk of fragmentation, competition and tension.

Astuteness was identified in the co-ordinator’s efforts to promote a collaborative culture between services. Some shared goals were about purpose and organisation, but also could involve seemingly insignificant (but highly symbolic) issues about whether one can eat at one’s desk or not. The hub was a small open-plan office space and the co-ordinator had to influence others beyond her direct authority, drawing on legitimacy to cross agency boundaries. Leadership was exercised in the dynamics of this close-knit setting, and managers in the initiative remained focused on outcomes by resolving these personal and professional tensions. This was done in such a way that preference was not shown to one service over another, requiring political astuteness to balance the varied interests.

Furthermore, matrix management (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1990) is often found where there is collaboration, requiring detailed attention to the bigger picture and the small snags that arise which can confuse or demotivate staff. It is important that a leader is able to move from the balcony to the dance floor (Heifetz, 1994), to understand the interaction between strategy and day-to day-operations. This requires leadership, not only management.

We restate leadership with political astuteness is necessary for public value creation when it involves shaping processes and outcomes where there are diverse and competing interests. This requires the exertion of influence beyond formal authority, and the maintenance of a strong sense of purpose in relation to public value creation.

Assessing Leadership for Public Value in a Multi-agency Setting

Our study provides a critical view of leading for public value in multi-agency collaboration where there are diverse and sometimes competing interests. A multi-agency hub provides a rich setting in which to research public value and leadership, because partners aim to work together, with greater or lesser success, to co-create an initiative.

In this case setting collaboration between partners was fundamental for the hub to succeed, and leadership enabled the orchestration of purpose, attention and resources beyond single organisational boundaries. This is horizontal public value creation between partners and it was a key element of this hub initiative. The case study suggests that political astuteness aids the exercise of leadership where complex relationships between partners exist. The study is valuable, as there is relatively little empirical research on public value and leadership and even less in the 'intimate' setting of a small open-plan work setting. In this case the evidence around public value points towards the leadership of the agency, rather than of a person.

The process of leading a hub for the purpose of public value creation is similarly informed by the literature on partnership working (Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Crosby et al, 2017). The findings illustrated that public value creation in a hub has aided an awareness of where collaboration might most effectively inform the public value proposition, and an understanding of the practices where cooperation and coordination may be less developed (Keast, Brown and Mandell, 2007; Keast and Mandell, 2012).

Collaboration may be easier to achieve in some activities over others. Understanding - and using - different leadership perspectives in specific contexts, particularly the leadership of people, service delivery and in collaborative governance processes (Dudau, 2009), will contribute to trying to ensure that the public value proposition is sustained.

Finally, to assess leadership for public value in the hub, we draw on the conceptualisation of public value as the two dimensions of 'what the public values' and 'what adds value to the public sphere' (Benington, 2011: 43 - 44).

Firstly, the paper considers the role of leadership for public value, in terms of Benington's (2011) first dimension of what the public value. For this hub, this view of public value speaks to how leaders try to understand the needs of service users, in a context where there are multiple interests. From the research evidence, service user data was mainly collected and value inferred through surveys, performance management indicators, and needs assessments. This highlights tensions about how collaboration with citizens adds value to the public sphere, for instance by service users participating in strategic planning, alongside how leaders balance resource allocation for front-line delivery.

The research analysed the data from the perspective of Benington's (2011) second dimension of 'what adds value to the public sphere'. This dimension suggests that the public sphere concerns what contributes to value in the wider society including widely and deeply held social values like fairness and inclusivity. This dimension can inform how leaders envisage the benefits of collaborative projects, as the public sphere may sometimes include services and activities from a diversity of sectors (Benington and Moore, 2011; Bryson et al. 2017). The second dimension found that community resilience, confidence and reductions in vulnerability may be seen as contributions to this wider sense of public value. The hub identified issues which could have been overlooked had it been left to the individual organisations to work independently of one another, and were able to contribute together to the wider community.

For Benington's framework, the case illustrates the variability of victims and the public value created by tailoring a range of services to the needs of individual victims, providing services that were more personalised but which also reflected building community resilience. This has been motivated by PCCs leading victim services provision, providing the opportunity for local multi-agency working.

CONCLUSION

A multi-agency hub for victims of crime was used to examine leadership and public value, which requires the delicate navigation of tensions when there are diverse and competing interests. The hub benefitted from leadership exercised with political astuteness (Hartley et al, 2019b). The theoretical perspective was informed by Benington's (2011) conceptualisation of public value as consisting of the two dimensions of 'what the public values' and 'what adds value to the public sphere'.

The paper has argued that leadership for public value in collaboration does not mean value will automatically be created. In this setting, leadership occurred across boundaries, showing that public value can, in some settings, be generated across diverse professions and different organisations.

Leadership with political astuteness was examined. The paper illustrates that leadership for public value was created through the means of exercising a range of skills to address

competing interests and dynamics at both strategic and operational levels, and across diverse agencies in a multi-agency context. Within the context of a multi-agency hub this was a valuable aspect of leadership which aided collaboration and helped to attenuate the tensions that can arise between factions with potentially diverse agendas.

To sum up, the paper makes two contributions. First, through considering in detail how pluralistic leadership is exercised to navigate the tensions which can arise between multi-agency partners working together in the pursuit of public value. The paper shows collaborative public value creation cannot be taken for granted but is steered and mobilised through leadership activities and behaviours. Utilising the theoretical lens of public value (Moore, 1995; Benington, 2011) the paper provides empirical research and argues for the idea that leadership shapes value creation in this context of collaboration. The paper draws on the conceptualisation of public value as consisting of the two dimensions of ‘what the public values’ and ‘what adds value to the public sphere’ (Benington, 2011: 43 - 44).

Secondly, the paper demonstrated that political astuteness is an important element of leadership in partnerships. This occurs where leaders apply a range of political skills and practices in situations involving multiple stakeholders (Hartley et al, 2015; Hartley et, 2019b). A study by Hartley et al (2019b) study examined how one organisation worked to create public value among different and sometimes competing publics, the empirical research here focuses on collaboration between various organisations and in a very confined physical space. This paper presents evidence to support the proposition that leadership with political astuteness is a valuable set of capabilities for leading teams working in small-scale multi-agency hubs where there are different interests and values. We suggest that these capabilities are likely to be relevant in any pluralistic setting.

This type of leadership involved forging a degree of consensus around practices out of different perspectives and roles, within the setting of a service where a policy initiative was being implemented. One practical implication is that, in a partnership setting, political astuteness is valuable to address both strategic and operational activities but also the small issues which can arise in the close setting of an open plan office with multiple agencies. Political astuteness involves a range of capabilities from strategic skills to personal and inter-personal skills.

This was a single case study of one multi-agency hub and it would be useful to investigate multiple case studies with a wider range of services and service users, which would aid generalisability. More studies which examine the detailed leadership processes which create (or lose) public value creation would be helpful.

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**Appendix 1 - Example of Coding Framework: Leading for Public Value in Multi-agency
Collaboration (informed by Gioia et al., 2013)**

