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Public Administration Scholarship and the Politics of Coproducing Academic–Practitioner Research

Developing greater cooperation between researchers and practitioners is a long-standing concern in social science. Academics and practitioners working together to coproduce research offers a number of potential gains for public administration scholarship, but it also raises some dilemmas. The benefits include bringing local knowledge to bear on the field, making better informed policy, and putting research to better use. However, coproduction of research also involves managing ambiguous loyalties, reconciling different interests, and negotiating competing goals. The authors reflect on their experience of coproducing a research project in the United Kingdom and discuss the challenges that coproducers of research confront. They situate the discussion within a consideration of traditions of public administration scholarship and debates about the role of the academy to understand better the politics of their joint practice. Thinking about the politics of coproduction is timely and enables the authors to become more attuned to the benefits and constraints of this mode of research.

I n this article, we consider the politics of cooperative knowledge production between practitioners and academics in the field of public administration. By "politics," we mean long-standing and ongoing debates about the purpose of public administration scholarship, but also the tricky issues that arise in coproducing research involving cooperative interactions between members of two communities that have distinct interests, expectations, and priorities. Coproduction of research has been gaining interest, particularly in relation to public administration scholarship. Joint projects promise the elusive goal of research that is simultaneously academically robust and useful to practitioners, and they challenge the customer–contractor convention—in which practitioners commission research that is then conducted, packaged, and delivered by academic teams—that has characterized much public management research. Our article provides insight into the

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dynamics of coproducing research and highlights the complexity of the choices and dilemmas involved. We argue that these dilemmas are inseparable from the politics of the academy and from the vexed issue of how to foster closer academic–practitioner relations.

The purposes of our article are to situate the current interest in academic–practitioner research collaboration within a historical perspective and to contribute to knowledge about the practical and political dynamics of joint research. In the first section of the article, we locate the interest in collaboration in the context of the ongoing development of the field of public administration and highlight competing views of the purpose of scholarship, the roles and responsibilities of the academy, and the basis of academic–practitioner relations. We suggest that these different (political) positions can be understood as reflecting different traditions of research and scholarship. Therefore, we look at the macro context of public administration scholarship, identifying intellectual, structural, and cultural factors that influence the basis for academic–practitioner relations. In the second part of the article, we turn a critical lens on ourselves as participants in both a collaborative study and interacting traditions of scholarship and practice. The second purpose of the article, therefore, is to look at the interplay of our own conduct and context. This reflexive process enables us to analyze the dynamics of coproduction through an examination of grounded research practice.

The relationship between academics and practitioners is one that is near and dear to the hearts of *PAR* readers. However, most editors of *PAR* in the last 60 years have lamented the lack of practitioner voices in the journal. As Richard J. Stillman II commented in a communication with the authors (2010), "since its first issue appeared in the Summer 1940, *PAR* emphasized the importance of connecting academic research to practitioner needs—as well as the

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reverse, practitioners influencing the direction and content of public administration research. Honestly this challenge, namely connecting these two sides of our field, remains my toughest editorial challenge today." In Dwight Waldo's outgoing editorial, in which he reflected on his long relationship with *PAR*, he mused that "[f]or the first issue of the *Review* under my supervision I wrote an editorial in which I stated that I perceived the central problem to be addressed, that of bridging the interests of the Society's [American Society for Public Administration's] two main constituencies, the practitioners and the academics. Eleven years later my perception has not changed" (1977, 317). In an editorial that mapped the history of the fragmented politics of the American Society for Public Administration and of *PAR*, Chester A. Newland described the journal's "ongoing struggles" for connectedness with practitioners and warned that this challenge "continues to become more difficult" (2000, 36).

Our article is cowritten by an academic and practitioner. Therefore, it is relatively unusual in that many of the conversations about connectedness have taken place between academics, with fewer examples of academic–practitioner dialogue to be found. The article is motivated by our experience of collaboration, experience that we locate within wider institutional, professional, and political norms, pressures, and expectations. One contribution is to bring together debates about collaboration with reflections of "actually practicing" coproducers of research. This task is worthwhile given the lack of written accounts of coproduction practices. The second contribution is to locate our reflections within the context of wider debates and traditions of public administration scholarship in order to illustrate that the dilemmas in our joint working are part of ongoing choices that we negotiate as part of the complex environment we each navigate as academics and practitioners. These are worthwhile contributions given the increased interest across both communities in joint research initiatives.

Clarifying the Concept of Coproduction
What's in a name? The difficult search for an appropriate term to describe research interactions between academics and practitioners itself suggests the political nature of joint research. We have tended to describe our work as involving "coproduction." By "coproduction," we mean, broadly, the accomplishment of research by academics and practitioners working together at each stage of the process, including conceptualization, design, fieldwork, analysis, and presentation of the work. In this journal, the term has been used by Sonia M. Ospina and Jennifer Dodge (2005b), who note that in public administration research, coproduction builds on the legacy of the early "pracademics" who sought to bring scholarship and practice closer together. A discourse of coproduction is to be found in a range of areas beyond research, including artistic, musical, and creative industries. The language of coproduction is increasingly found in public services to denote the idea that service users' choices and behaviors are integral to the development and delivery of the services (Bovaird 2007; Boyle, Clark, and Burns 2006; Taylor 1971). For instance, it has been used to denote a new way of thinking about welfare provision at a time when resources are declining and expectations are rising (Boyle and Harris 2009). It has been used by organizations entering into partnership, as well as by

state agencies trying to "join up" government through collaborative programs and provision. In the classroom, coproduction has challenged the old assumption about the transmission of knowledge to passive learners (Berggren and Söderlund 2008; Hartley 2008). In these examples, we can see that coproduction is based on a critique of the status quo, whether in the academy or in the professions. Coproduction is both a critique of existing practices and a response to their shortcomings (Orr and Bennett 2010).

However, as *PAR*'s former editor in chief remarked to us, in the context of public administration research, "coproduction" may connote attaining business results, not necessarily advancing the broader interest or public welfare (Stillman 2010). And we accept that it may carry overtones of scientific management, rather than describe a process of experimentation in keeping with a spirit of inquiry. An alternative term, one that we use from time to time, "joint research," is perhaps slightly anodyne. Yet another, "research partnerships," may imply an institutional basis for collaboration rather than capturing the personal interests and relationships that animate cooperative endeavors. Indeed, a number of writers have reflected that good social relations and mutual empathy are prerequisites for effective joint knowledge creation (Easterby-Smith and Malina 1999; Rogers 1995; Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001). Research collaboration? We note that the verb "to collaborate" carries ambiguity given its dual meaning as "to work together with another or others on something," but also the derogative definition as "to co-operate or collude with an enemy" (see *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary*, 2010, http://www.chambersharrap.co.uk/ chambers/features/chref/chref.py/main?query=collaborate&title= 21st). To complicate things further, a spectrum of "collaborative" methodologies have been advocated by researchers. These include cooperative inquiry (Heron 1996; Reason 1999), engaged scholarship (Van de Ven and Johnson 2006), and action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001). In this article, we will sometimes draw on these alternatives, but in largely settling on the term "coproduction," we do so knowingly, mindful of its overtones and limitations, but signaling that we are part of political imperatives to *produce*. However, we will also seek to understand the concept and practices of coproduction within what we describe as the political struggles to shape the future of public administration.

Traditions of Public Administration Research
The significance of pracademics in the early development of the field indicates a long-standing tradition of public administration as an inclusive field of study, rather than one in which academics and practitioners operate at arm's length from each other (Ospina and Dodge 2005a; Posner 2009; Zody 1977). Michael J. Bolton and Gregory B. Stolcis suggest that "the disconnect in public administration is a relatively recent phenomenon. Gulick, White, and Merriam, as well as many of the field's other founding fathers, saw little difference between practice and theory, partly because they were both practitioners and scholars, the original 'pracademics.' … research [was] … a way to synthesize what they had experienced as practitioners" (2003, 627). Patricia Shields's (2008) superb essay demonstrates how the field was deeply influenced by John Dewey (1927) and other pragmatists who

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Table 1 Using Raadschelders's Traditions of Public Administration Scholarship to Explore Different Understandings of Academic–Practitioner Relations

	Practical Wisdom	Practical Experience	Scientific Knowledge	Relativist Perspectives
Purpose of research	Gaining a better understanding of practice and developing ideas that have application to practice	Making technical refinements to practice	Search for better scientific understanding and principles	Producing multiple interpretations of action and context; deconstructing dominant narratives and prescriptions
Relationship with practitioners	Engaged interest, normative commitment to betterment of public administration practice	Mission to give solutions and prescriptions for practitioners	Practitioners as objects of study, practice and institutions and arena for inquiry	Ambiguous normative commitment
Obligations of researchers	To develop applied theory, enhance practice, and support practitioners	Refine practices, improve public administration practices	To science and the academy, to the stock of human knowledge	To diverse communities of researchers and, less centrally, to reflective practitioners
Role of practitioners	Dialogue with academics, enabling access to organizational settings for researchers to apply new research knowledge	A role for pracademics, practitioners seen as the expert voice in diagnosing problems and setting agendas	Enabling access to organizational settings, largely as objects of inquiry	Enabling access to organizational settings, largely as objects of inquiry; practitioners encouraged to engage in reflective practice

stressed the experimental nature of its knowledge base and therefore the importance of nurturing close university–practitioner collaboration. She describes how the ideas of pragmatism provided a fertile theoretical base for an emerging profession charged with making government work. Shields argues that the influence of classical pragmatism has been overlooked, perhaps because it has become part of the taken-for-granted practice of actors. In our approach to situating the practice of coproduction within the politics of the field, we build on Shields's insight into the enduring influence of a scholarly concern for practice, but we suggest some additional influences and struggles, using these to highlight the contested nature of the purpose of public administration research and of the ethical responsibilities of participants.

One reading of the field, therefore, is that it has been imbued with the benign and progressive influence of classical pragmatism. An alternative reading is that the interdisciplinary nature of public administration is born of and sustained by struggle and contestation rather than by harmonious cooperation and tolerance. Such struggles are, in part, a "crisis of identity" (Waldo 1968). This description refers to a split in which scholars have wrestled with whether public administration should be a science built on rigorous methods—the enshrinement of public administration as a science like any other, in which positivism and rationalism are key features in the pursuit of scientific knowledge (Houston and Delevan 1990; Mainzer 1994; McCurdy and Cleary 1984; Perry and Kraemer 1986; Stallings and Ferris 1988; White 1986a, 1986b; White and McSwain 1990)—or a multitheoretical enterprise focused on engaging with practitioner and society-relevant concerns—public administration as a normative endeavor involving service to the community, as an aid for practitioners and as a subject for professional training and study (Frederickson 1980; Marini 1971; Perry and Kraemer 1986; Waldo 1952; Wamsley and Wolf 1996).

Jos C. N. Raadschelders (2008) adds to our appreciation of the study's fundamental heterodoxy and interdisciplinarity by suggesting four general traditions in the study of government in public administration. In addition to the "holists" and "scientists," Raadschelders points to the lasting presence of prewar, inductive public administration and to the growing influence of the most recent tradition in public administration, namely, relativist perspectives associated with postmodernism. He offers the categories of practical wisdom,

practical experience, scientific knowledge, and relativist perspectives to describe four traditions of scholarship. As Mark Bevir notes, "an appeal to traditions suggests that methodology and practice necessarily go along together in broader webs of belief. It suggests that we should think not of a given empirical domain, but rather of the facts being constructed differently within each of the approaches" (2001, 479–80). In other words, the continuing development of public administration research is imbued with social as well as theoretical dilemmas (Bevir 2001; Bevir and Richards 2009; Orr and Vince 2009). We use these insights to suggest that each of Raadschelders's traditions carries a different set of objectives and therefore different intellectual and political commitments for scholarship. Using Raadschelders's work, in table 1, we draw out the assumptions about the basis of academic–practitioner relations that are dominant within each tradition. For each tradition, we consider its assumptions about public administration research. In particular, we outline the ways in which each tradition suggests a different purpose of research, a particular set of relationships with practitioners, a distinctive set of obligations on academics, and a particular set of roles for practitioners.

Arguments for Collaborative Research

We situate our experience of undertaking a joint research project within wider normative debates about the relationships between academic researchers and practitioners (as mapped in table 1). Recently, these have been wrapped up in discussions about the roles, responsibilities, and future of the academy—often, in particular, of business schools—and especially the responsibilities of scholars and their duties to practitioners. Like books on Victorian etiquette, much of this discussion has come to center on contested views of proper connectedness and proper distance.

Ospina and Dodge (2005b) have argued in this journal that the tension between cumulative science and practice-grounded research is a permanent threat to any aspiration to connectedness, and they frame a series of important questions about the relationships between academics and practitioners, including who produces knowledge, for whom, and for what purposes. These are questions that members of different traditions continue to struggle to come to terms with and yet influence the capacity for making connections.

Different reasons have been offered for the difficulties involved. Réjean Landry, Moktar Lamari, and Nabil Amara (2003)

distinguish between explanations that center on "organizational interests" and those that focus on cultural differences between the "two communities." Organizational interest explanations assume that university research is underutilized by practitioners because of a mismatch between the focus of research and the focus of knowledge that is needed, the timeliness of the research, and the need to advance scholarly knowledge, which supersedes practitioners' everyday concerns (Chelimsky 1997; Martin 2010). "Two-communities" explanations center on cultural differences between a diverse range of practitioners and academics that result in a lack of communication between them and, consequently, low levels of knowledge utilization (Caplan 1979; Oh and Rich 1996; Webber 1987). The difficulties are compounded by practitioners and academics talking a different language (Dunn 1980; Walker 2010).

PAR has provided an important forum for debate about how these dynamics can be understood. Bolton and Stolcis argue that the problematic nature of collaboration can be traced to the aims and incentives of universities, which means that, "Although it would be an admirable objective to help solve organizational and administrative problems in public-sector organizations, this does not fit with the goals and rewards for researchers. Academics are trained to generate knowledge in their respective disciplines, not necessarily to solve organizational problems" (2003, 627). Paul L. Posner identifies that "[p]ractitioners often have little time and encouragement to develop journal articles or conference papers in general. Indeed, publication of articles on issues encountered in the workplace is often viewed as a risk, not an asset, to the agency by top officials. It is no surprise, accordingly, that submissions of articles for the *Public Administration Review* are overwhelmingly made by academics, with practitioners comprising only 5 percent of the total" (2009, 21). Beryl A. Radin describes theory and practice as the separate purviews of two quite different worlds, which creates a tension between the world of the academy as "the keeper of theory" and the world of practitioners as "the watchdog over practice." She remarks that "[t]his tension is found in many aspects of the public administration profession. This journal, for example, has attempted to balance both perspectives over the years, sometimes satisfying both sets of players and sometimes meeting neither of their expectations" (2010, 289).

These concerns about the fissure between academics and practitioners—that they exist in two worlds or that they have different, and difficult to reconcile, interests—have played through commentaries and debates in the United Kingdom over the same period. Such anxieties have given rise to many rallying calls for greater connectedness, made by members of management research communities and by government bodies with a stake in research policy (Antonacopoulou 2010; British Academy 2008; Research Council Economic Impact Group 2006). Such exhortations were given momentum by the "rigor and relevance debate," in which academics have tried to articulate the purpose of management research, and have discussed the responsibilities of scholars to practitioners. For example, Andrew Pettigrew has been an influential voice in arguing for more research that can meet the "twin hurdles" of academic rigor and practitioner relevance, to be accomplished through achieving "a more porous boundary between science and society" (2001, S67) and a greater range of participants in the knowledge development process. Part of the debate in the United

Kingdom has been driven by a wider concern for the future role of business schools in the "knowledge society," which is currently talked about in terms of the "impact" of research on policy and practice (Higher Education Funding Council England 2010).

In this sense, bearing in mind Raadschelders's description of the complexity of the public administration mission, U.K. business schools have suffered from their own parallel crisis of identity in the last two decades. Ken Starkey and Paula Madan (2001) warn that business schools face a "relevance gap," while Starkey and Sue Tempest (2005) argue that a fragmented environment for knowledge production means that the academy no longer holds a monopoly position and therefore needs to reconfigure its activities and work with a plurality of actors and organizations at the interface of theory and practice. In this way, they suggest, "The university cannot re-establish the broken unity of knowledge but it can open up avenues of communication between these different kinds of knowledge, in particular knowledge as science and knowledge as culture" (Starkey and Tempest 2005, 76–77). In such interventions to address anxieties about competition to business schools, and the "relevance gap" of academic research, and to reflect on the purpose of management scholarship in the twenty-first century, a key role of academics has been identified as entailing a responsibility to ensure connectivity between the two cultures and communities.

Dissenting voices have been provided by some academics who have challenged the anxiety expressed about relevance, arguing instead for the right of researchers to pursue agendas that transcend short-term ideas about what constitutes relevant research: the duty of academics is to pursue research that reflects their own intellectual curiosity and is not bound by business-derived targets or an instrumental need to "add value" to the organizational settings of practitioners (Grey 2001, 2010; Weick 1996, 2001). This duty is asserted as a principle of academic autonomy and a core part of academic identity, even if it may be less likely to deliver insights that practitioners may find useful. Any concern for relevance should be sublimated by the duty to carry out rigorous, intellectually credible research. For example, Christopher Grey (2001, 2010) problematizes the notion of research "relevance" on two grounds. The first is that much of the debate has tended to underplay the historical contribution that universities have made in generating practical or socially useful knowledge and the support that such research has provided to industrial, social, and technological development across the last two centuries. His second argument is to remind us that the "production of useless knowledge is a public good because it is the price to pay for the possibility of producing useful knowledge" (Grey 2001, S29). In other words, central to universities' capacity to deliver social good is the license to work free from the necessity of "relevance."

This ongoing debate, therefore, has been a very lively one and has been characterized as "tribal warfare" (Gulati 2007). At stake are arguments that go beyond simply the mode of research or the choice of research philosophy (thorny though these are) to include the relationships between academics and practitioners and, especially, the responsibilities of academics; attempts to position business schools as sustainable and profitable institutions; perspectives on the expectations that practitioners may have of academics; the autonomy of scholars; the balance between rigor and relevance; the scope for irrelevance; the costs and benefits of distance; the extent to

which autonomy is somehow sovereign or is to be negotiated in the face of imperatives confronted by members of other communities; and struggles involving the influence of senior academic leaders on the legitimacy of the practices of members of their own communities.

The significance and contested nature of these issues remind us that the practices surrounding the coproduction of public administration research take place in a politicized setting. Scholarly practices and attempts to reshape them—whether in the discipline of public administration specifically or in management research more generally—do not occur in an autonomous professional space free from wider influences, interests, and agendas. A good example is how the study of governmental power and action (the practices of public managers) has been influenced by the power of state organizations (Bevir 2001). In this way, the state represents a fluid collection of interests that exert sway on public administration scholars, the status and standing of their intellectual communities, and the funding and strategic priorities of their university settings. Governments provide incentives (such as grants linked to specified criteria), a policy framework for higher education, and influence on agendas through media management (Bevir 2001; Martin 2010). In turn, academics have helped create new knowledge on that practitioners have used to transform the activities of the state. These ideas point to the systematic intertwining of academics and practitioners and highlight another way in which their reflexive interactions are governed by a complexity of factors, including the political and the instrumental.

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The Rise and Rise of Coproduction

Coproduction represents a rich example of the intertwining of academics and practitioners. We now examine the increasing interest in coproduction, situating it within a policy framework for research emanating from a range of U.K. public sector bodies, before looking at the advocacy of this particular mode of research by a range of academics. It has become a fairly consensus view among policy makers in the United Kingdom that greater cooperation between practitioners and academics has the potential to produce more relevant agendas, better-quality research, and higher impact on practice. One implication of this policy discourse may be that research has not quite been up to scratch in these respects. In any case, it is clear that there are growing calls to achieve greater integration (British Academy 2008; Higher Education Funding Council England 2009).

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In the arena of U.K. local government, the site of our own joint research project, a recent strategic review of the relationship between the government's research funding bodies (Research Councils) and local government makes a similar case for a "closer relationship" in the interests of "better informed research, better informed policy, and better informed practice" (Grace 2006, 2). It identifies that practitioners are being denied useful knowledge, and academics are missing out on chances to feed into developments in practice. The U.K. Research Councils subsequently signed a concordat with the national representative bodies of local government. The concordat aimed to strengthen the role of the Local Authority Research Council Initiative, an initiative whose protagonists describe as bringing together "the worlds of Local Government" and "world-class researchers." The Concordat espouses a partnership between local government and Research Councils and a closer relationship between local government and Research Councils to coproduce new knowledge (LARCI 2007). Similarly, Fiona Armstrong and Adrian Alsop of the Economic and Social Research Council—the major U.K. government body for social science research funding—provide a perspective on how best to address the challenges of achieving both scholarly and practical impact, highlighting the growing political emphasis on the need to justify the benefits of research to public policy, economic prosperity, culture, and quality of life. They emphasize the "crucial role of coproduction in achieving impact" and its significance as a means of encouraging interdisciplinary research, arguing that "[w]e must challenge the notion that coproduced research hampers bold, risky and transformative research—there is no automatic constraint, and in many cases, co-produced research can be transformational" (2010, 210).

Arguments for this form of collaboration have critiqued traditional modes of knowledge generation and the misplaced assumption of academics' superiority over (less educated or sophisticated) practitioners that such relations are held to presume (Bartunek and Trullen 2007; Evered and Louis 1981). In this way, Carl Milofsky (2000) describes collaborative research as a partnership between stakeholders with complementary forms of expertise, rather than one between experts and lay consumers of knowledge. Dvora Yanow (2004) has argued that academics have been slow to recognize the expertise, knowledge, and insights of organizational actors, instead presiding over models of commissioned research in which academics come up with dubious answers that are then passed down to practitioners. For Yanow, "The language of 'customer' and 'client' [for research projects] maintains boundaries that are conceptual alone, despite systems-theoretical arguments for open systems and permeable boundaries. The esteem in which technical expertise is held, and the concomitant denigration of local knowledge, contributes further to organizational processes that are patronizing and demeaning, and which ultimately do not serve the organization well" (2004, S23). In a related critique of academic–practitioner relationships, Armand Hatchuel positions joint research as a means of reducing mimetic behavior and "blind compliance to gurus or fashion in management practice" (2001, S33). In echoes of Shields's description of classical pragmatism, Paul O'Hare, Jon Coaffee, and Marian Hawkesworth (2010) highlight mutual learning through actors playing the roles of critical friend, which unsettles the traditional relationship between the researcher and the researched.

Given the widespread exhortation for greater connectedness and some emerging caveats, a critical examination, based on practice, of the potential value and possible pitfalls of coproduction, seems opportune. Using a process of critical reflection centering on our own experience of carrying out research as a joint academic–practitioner team, we offer a number of tentative observations about our own practices, the better to illuminate some of the tensions and dilemmas identified earlier, and to show the ways in which the practices of coproduction involve navigating institutional, sectoral, and professional norms and interests.

Three Vignettes on Coproducing Research

We begin this section by offering the reflection that dilemmas emerge from our roles within the research team, our relationships with each other, and our loyalties to our own communities or "tribes." The process of coproducing research, therefore, is inherently political and requires continual negotiation. We now try to illustrate these observations through a set of related vignettes.

Our research project explored the leadership practices of U.K. local council chief executives. So far, it has generated a range of outputs, including conference papers, journal articles, a special issue of a journal, and practitioner papers (see, e.g., Bennett and Orr 2010; Orr and Bennett 2010). From its inception, our research embraced the idea of academics and practitioners coproducing research. The project involved speaking to chief executives about how they use stories as a leadership device and how storytelling enables learning in peer-to-peer communication. It was only at a later stage of the work that it struck us that it would be useful to reflect on the opportunities and constraints of coproduction. Though we became aware of the sharp edges, gray areas, and politicized nature of our joint endeavor, we noticed that these issues have not tended to receive much comment in public administration accounts.

Perhaps the first thing for us to state is our reasons for pursuing the project—these are a brew of personal, professional, and instrumental motivations. Our personal history and relationship have influenced our research together. We have known each other for almost 20 years. After working together in a U.K. university in the 1990s, our careers diverged. Bennett moved out of academia to work for a high-profile professional association representing U.K. public managers (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, or SOLACE) before Orr took up a new academic role in another business school. Bennett's roles involve leading SOLACE's policy development and government and stakeholder relations. He has engaged in research both when he was employed in a university and subsequently. Orr has continued to write on topics related to public administration and to work with practitioners through management development and research studies. In beginning the project, part of our motivation was to create an opportunity to work together again. We also surface Bennett's wish to maintain an academic profile from within a practitioner setting, and Orr's desire to cultivate a profile among practitioners from an academic base. There was also a recognition that we were enhancing each other's professional capacity and that working jointly might open up new possibilities. As Bennett later commented to Orr, "It was something we could do and something that seemed kind of *uniquely* something

we could do—something that you couldn't do on your own and something that I couldn't do."

Vignette 1: Working with Norms and Interests—The Embedded Assumptions Underlying Our Approach

Conducting any research entails resources, whether intellectual, financial, reputational, or simply time and energy. Joint research necessitates a commitment of resources from at least two organizations to "sanction" the research and then agreement from the intended organizations in which any fieldwork will take place. In confronting the challenge of persuading our respective employing organizations to back our project, we used targeted language that would speak to each constituency.

For Orr's organization, a U.K. university, he was able to tap into the "taken-for-granted" norms and assumptions about academics' roles—academics must do research, and if, given the current politics of business schools and their agendas of connecting with organizational practices, this means working with practitioners, so much the better. However, the audit culture is growing in U.K. and European universities (Yanow 2010), and the doctrine of "publish or perish" is well established. Though the obligation to do research is taken for granted, the subsequent assessment of its value is a key factor—the opportunities to "do research" rapidly diminish if the academic is judged not to be delivering. As Orr said to Bennett, "We shouldn't ignore the night terrors, the almost constant anxiety about publishing which drives a lot of my decision making—what I get involved in, how I see our work together, and how I prioritize my time and energy. What our project yields in terms of publications or grant income is the 'bottom line' for my employer, and any future employer, even though you and I might have other aspirations as well."

For Bennett, the immediate task was challenging, and it involved more effortful strategies of framing the meaning of the project in terms that would appeal to the interests of his organization and his responsibilities within it. In other words, gaining the sanction to go ahead was a task that required much more negotiation and one that relied on being able to highlight how the interests of the organization or the wider profession would benefit.

We sometimes combined our arguments to imply that our work would cross the "twin hurdles" of rigor and relevance. Practitioners could be assured that the work had an academic seal of approval, and the academic community could be satisfied that the work was deemed worthwhile by practitioners. Running through our invitation to chief executives to participate in interviews, for example, was an insistence that the research offered both academic and practitioner value. We decided that it was important for our pitch that we could appeal to those pragmatists who wanted to know what the practical payoff would be, as well as to those who would be pleased by the idea of contributing to wider knowledge. The message to chief executives, therefore, was that our project had use value, but it was also "serious" scholarship.

In other cases, recognizing it as a hot button issue for national funding bodies, the theme of practitioner relevance was a prominent feature of the different bids that we made for external funding. This was most obvious in our promises to outline the "practical

implications" for executive development. Academic knowledge (or "important areas of leadership research") was invoked to buttress the idea that practitioners need to pay more attention to this area. In the time-honored language of appeals for funding, we contended that our study would begin to "fill a gap," especially the lack of knowledge about this aspect of chief executives' practices. Within these appeals, we sometimes included a knowing inference that the private sector was ahead of the game in taking the issue seriously.

These readings and judgments were a significant part of our joint practices, and yet these kinds of moves are seldom given an airing in most mainstream accounts of the research process. As it seemed fairly obvious to us that we needed to engage in these strategies in order to make the research happen, we reflect that we have internalized the significance of these imperatives, or that we have learned to operate with a certain level of political awareness, sussing out the nuances of what is important to each constituency and presenting the case for resources, and for access to the chief executives, accordingly. In competently navigating the intersection of our two worlds, an appreciation of the need to argue, contingently, that our project would contribute value to both tribes has become embedded in our practice. These examples suggest how sectoral norms and priorities shape our context and influence our practice, but also how, as situated actors, we then use these preexisting imperatives and traditions reflexively to help negotiate the research process.

Vignette 2: Two Worlds—Coalitions and Collisions

Coproduction promises the capacity to facilitate communication between academic and practitioner communities, and yet perhaps one of the principal challenges facing coproduction is the distance between the academic and practitioner worlds. The British Academy (2008) has expressed optimism about this issue, offering the view that "[b]oth sides would welcome increased opportunities for dialogue and exchange." Such optimism may be well founded, but we offer a slightly different set of observations about attitudes in our arena. During the course of our research, we collected frequent, widespread, and unsolicited comments about academia from practitioners. Each of our practitioner interviewees had something negative to say on the subject of academics. One chief executive vividly expressed mystification at the way in which academics can seemingly generate something from nothing: "I thought it [storytelling] was quite a clever topic to pick up on. How much it can be expanded to make kind of real treatise out of … well, I suppose it's possible because you do it all the time! As academics!" Our participants largely seemed to perceive academia as an insular profession that requires modes of thought, analysis, and language that are divergent from chief executives' day-to-day lives.

We reflect that in interviewing members of an elite group, a certain sense of separateness comes with the territory—whether that elite group contains judges, politicians, or chief executives. What may be distinctive in the case of our group are the skills they had acquired in knowing how to hold other worlds at a distance, perhaps in order to better consider their strategic response to them. Council chief executives can be practiced scrutinizers who enjoy

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employing a steely gaze! They are also multipurpose managers who rely on specialists but also pride themselves on having the larger view—in other words, again, they are different from their colleagues in the organization. Perhaps this aspect of identity—they are not professional specialists—informs their view of academics, who, after all, have pursued careers, as the old saying goes, through trying to know more and more about less and less. Whatever the particularities of our study, we suggest that issues of mutual perception are of wider relevance for managing cross-community projects.

Academics may have earned skepticism through communicating badly with, or talking down to, practitioner communities. As many of the authors reviewed in the earlier part of this article have argued, academics may misunderstand the needs of practitioners or can be overly aloof. Indeed, reflecting on our career experiences, we can call to mind innumerable examples of academics relating in patronizing ways to practitioners. We have heard countless disparaging remarks by academics about the limitations of practitioners. One senior academic we spoke to described practitioners, casually but with some confidence, as people who earned "elephant salaries" despite having done less well at school. A senior academic referee for a national funding body adopted a similarly patronizing stance when commenting on a bid that we had made for a grant to support our fieldwork, offering the comment that while he or she could quite well understand the importance of storytelling, chief executives would not grasp this insight. Implying a hierarchy in which academics have knowledge about practitioners that they themselves cannot access, the referee wrote, "Storytelling is undoubtedly an important element of how chief executives learn from one another, whether through informal networking or 'story based' schemes such as Beacon Councils and Best Practice initiatives. But I doubt that most chief executives would understand or respond well to the concept of storytelling." In this way, maybe tribes will reap what they sow. While the rhetoric of coproduction is of closer working, actors in both communities need to work with senses of the distance between the values, norms, and assumptions of these worlds and with the collisions that occur when they come together through initiatives such as joint research. Coproducing research holds the potential for creative coalitions, but also the possibility of the clash of cultures.

Vignette 3: The Divided Loyalties of the Practitioner as Researcher—Adding Insights or Presenting Constraints?

In exploring the politics of coproduced research, we embrace the maxim that the personal is the political. We do not operate in isolation from career structures, performance management regimes, structures of reward and sanctions, or the norms and expectations of employers and peers. This observation has relevance for understanding the interests at stake within the joint research team. Jean M. Bartunek and Meryl R. Louis (1996) offer the term "insider/outsider" to describe a situation in which one member of the research team knows the participants and the other member does not. Insider status can facilitate access and rapport with participants. However, it also raises the question of what is the price of access, and how the multiple loyalties of the insider—to the community, to career, and to the outsider—are negotiated.

In thinking about how Bennett used his insider status to secure access to the elite group of chief executives, we recall Michael H. Agar's (1996) concept of the concept of "professional stranger handler," a person who performs the gatekeeping role to regulate outsiders' access to a group. Bennett found it necessary to perform this regulatory role in our project because his reputation is, to some extent, dependent on what chief executives say about him, and his future career may rely on their support. His salary was paid by an organization to which the chief executives pay membership fees. He will require their participation in future activities. These considerations mean that he needed our project, at the least, to do no harm to his relationship with his colleagues. Furthermore, because he had sought their participation on our behalf, he owed them a duty of good faith. It is possible to think of Bennett as being in the middle between the interests of the group of chief executives and of the research team. While this spatial metaphor is helpful illustratively, it may not capture the dilemmas involved in that mediation.

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For Ken C. Erickson and Donald D. Stull, insiders may have a facility to better interpret the nuances of the interviews, and yet they can become embroiled in the political agendas of "their people" (1988, 29). In other words, there is a tension between garnering the insights that insiders can offer on the basis of their prior knowledge and deeper sense of contextual dynamics, and those same insiders becoming encumbered by the politics of their own network. At a relatively early stage of the fieldwork, Bennett described to Orr some of the dilemmas with which he was struck:

> This is a relationship of trust in which I suppose, in certain circumstances, I would see myself as guardian of the chief executives' interests … the issue for me is that our research has a potential political impact, and certainly has a potential impact on the future of the chief executive profession and therefore is one in which the presentation of the research will be subject to political considerations. To put it in stark terms, "SOLACE head says chief executives manipulate truth for own ends" is not the kind of headline in the *Municipal Journal* [a trade publication] that I want the launch of our report to create. On the other hand, I really, really want the outputs of our research to report how chief executives tell stories to construct and influence organisational and political realities.

On a later occasion, taking stock of the interview process, Bennett provided the following critical reflection in an e-mail: "Our—both our—immediate reactions to the interviews were often satirical, focusing on the non sequiturs, the fatuous, the manipulative and the strange. Did I defend them against your attacks? Did I join in but then row back? Was I the first to see sense in their comments or did I try to put their comments in context?"

Recognizing that researchers have personal and institutional stakes illuminates otherwise obscured issues about political relations involved in research projects, especially in coproduced research studies. If, in general, it is disingenuous to imply through the presentation of research accounts that research is a clean, objective process carried out by purists who stand above politics, then the picture is further complicated in joint projects, where participants are mindful of a complexity of interacting demands, interests, and imperatives.

Conclusion: Reflecting on the Politics and Practice of Coproduction in Public Administration Research

In this article, we engage with widespread calls to foster a reconnection between academics and practitioners in public administration scholarship. Situating the current interest in academic–practitioner research collaboration within a historical context enables us to highlight that the continuing development of public administration scholarship is part of a long-standing, highly contested, and fluid debate about the values and purpose of research, the roles and responsibilities of academics, the expectations of practitioners on the academy, and the basis of academic–practitioner relations. We use Raadschelders's traditions to illuminate the lines of these debates. Our second contribution is to offer insights about the practical and political dynamics of joint research by reflecting on our experience of coproducing research. Turning the lens on ourselves as participants in a collaborative project allows us to highlight the interplay of our own conduct and context—how we negotiate the interacting traditions of scholarship and research practice and the norms and demands of our professions. Through the reflective vignettes, we illustrate that the dilemmas and choices we face are intertwined with the way in which wider traditions, expectations, and imperatives play out in our sectors. Thus, our article provides a macro analysis combined with attention to situated research practices, highlighting the many connected layers of politics. We hope that this exercise contributes an initiating framework for others to consider the politics of their collaborative practices.

Joint projects may mark a return to some of the roots of public administration scholarship, but they also present a set of ongoing challenges. For their advocates, they promise a way forward for integrating theory and practice and contributing knowledge for the benefit of both academics and practitioners. Coproduction may confer practical benefits, including access to elites and other worlds and the capacity to build trust quickly, the better to surface stories, experiences, and insights into practice. Coproduction may also offer the potential to draw practitioners closer to the benefits of academic inquiry and perhaps may enable academics to inquire about the worlds of practice in less condescending ways. However, we have emphasized the ways in which such research takes place within a political environment, requiring the continual negotiation of different interests, including those of the members of the team, the communities to which they belong, and the structural imperatives at the intersection of universities and the public sector. All research is purposeful and involves people who owe allegiances to others, but coproduction appears to give rise to distinctive expressions of these dynamics. Though it is tempting to sweep tensions and dilemmas under the carpet lest they get in the way of a movement toward greater connectedness, paying attention to these dynamics is worthwhile, as it can contribute to a richer set of understandings of the context of joint endeavors and the roles, relations, and stakes involved.

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