Bringing Beneficiaries More Centrally Into Nonprofit Management Education and Research

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Abstract

In the early 1970s, scholars studying a variety of service organizations realized that beneficiaries were not only external stakeholders who received services but they were also important organizational actors whose participation in the organization affected the organization's structure, functioning, and outcomes. Tracing these early observations, and the related concepts of coproduction, value cocreation, and partial membership, this article considers why these ideas have not been more central to nonprofit education and research. After offering likely explanations, the article reports results from a systematic literature review in three nonprofit journals. The results show that despite the limited attention to these ideas, research findings reveal that beneficiaries are important organizational actors, whose participation in the nonprofit matters for the work of staff, leaders, and ultimately for social impact. The article concludes with suggestions for bringing beneficiaries more centrally into nonprofit management research and education.

Beginning in the early 1970s scholars across the social sciences studying a variety of service organizations realized that beneficiaries were not only external stakeholders who simply received services but they were also important organizational actors whose participation in the organization affected the structure, functioning, and

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outcomes of the organization. For example, public management scholars used the term *coproduction* to call attention to the contributions citizens made to the municipal and social services they received and the significance of this for policy outcomes (Brudney & England, 1983; E. Ostrom, 1996; Parks et al., 1981; Rich & Gregg, 1975). In business schools, scholars noticed that customers played a dual role as both consumers and producers of services, which meant they judged the value of the service not only on the tangible result of the service but also on their experiences participating in the service process—an observation that eventually led to the idea of *value cocreation* (Berry & Parasuraman, 1993; Eiglier et al., 1977; Grönroos, 1978; Normann, 1984). For their part, sociologists and social work scholars studying a variety of human service organizations suggested that clients were *partial members* of these organizations. They theorized that the greater equality between the client and the organization, that is, the fuller their membership, the more the client would commit, contribute, and get involved in the organization, ultimately affecting the structure and functioning of the organization itself (Hasenfeld, 1983; Parsons, 1961; Rosengren & Lefton, 1970).

These common observations, although novel at the time, are not surprising in retrospect when we consider the dramatic shift in the economy from manufacturing to services following World War II (see Fuchs, 1968). But what is surprising is how little these observations seem to have influenced our teaching and research about nonprofit organizations (NPOs). For example, an analysis of the table of contents and indices of 57 nonprofit management (NPM) texts shows that the intended beneficiaries—whether they are called clients, constituents, consumers, customers, participants, recipients, service users, or the target population—are discussed predominantly in marketing and evaluation chapters rather than in other chapters such as human resource management or volunteer management, suggesting that they are viewed as external stakeholders to attract or ultimately impact. Similarly, an analysis of research published in three main nonprofit journals (*Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, and *Voluntas*) shows that roughly 5% of empirical studies published in a 20-year period 1998–2018 included "beneficiary" or related terms in the abstract, title, or keyword; less than half of those included information about beneficiaries inside the nonprofit, with only five articles explicitly using the coproduction concept for nonprofit beneficiaries (see Supplemental Appendix for Methodology).[1]

This article makes a case for bringing beneficiaries more centrally into nonprofit management education and research. The article argues that beneficiaries are not simply external stakeholders who are the targets of nonprofit social change efforts; they are also internal organizational actors whose participation impacts the day-to-day work of staff and volunteers as well as the beneficiaries themselves. This article also suggests that understanding beneficiaries as organizational actors is critical for supporting nonprofit leaders in the face of ongoing questions about the impact of their organization and its broader contribution to civil society. Moreover, as scholars of organizations, nonprofit researchers are well placed to expand our understanding of beneficiaries beyond narrow program intervention terms to more fully account for their role in organizations.

To make this case, this article takes the following steps. First, the article provides a historical overview of how scholars in three fields came to recognize beneficiaries as central organizational actors. Second, the article considers why these ideas did not find their way into nonprofit management education and research, offering three likely explanations based on a review of early discussions in the field of NPM education. Third, the article turns to current research about nonprofits and their beneficiaries published in three major nonprofit journals between 1998 and 2018 (*Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, and *Voluntas*) to show that although most researchers are not using these concepts directly, their detailed empirical findings provide evidence of the relevance of these ideas for nonprofits. The final section suggests next steps for bringing beneficiaries more centrally into nonprofit management education and research.

Before proceeding, I want to clarify my use of the terms. I use the term *beneficiary* throughout to refer to the primary person that the nonprofit hopes will directly benefit from its work. Any term for the individuals, families, and communities that work with nonprofits to make changes in their lives is limited in its own way. The fact that we have so many terms seems to reflect the diverse relationships beneficiaries have to nonprofits. I use the term beneficiary because it connotes someone who simply receives benefits from a nonprofit and provides a useful juxtaposition to the more dynamic picture of beneficiaries presented in this article. I use the term *nonprofit* broadly to refer to mission-based organizations, including both member and nonmember organizations. Although it is easiest to see the applicability of these ideas to human service nonprofits, I provide examples that show they are germane to a variety of nonprofits but recognize that further research will test the extent of their relevance. Finally, I use the word *management* to refer to the operation and governance of organizations. Although the term management, in contrast to administration, has been associated with specific types of reforms, most notably new public management, I use the term in a generic sense (Alford & Freijser, 2018).

Beneficiaries as Organizational Actors

The idea that beneficiaries participate in organizations in ways that matter for the organization's structure, functioning, and impact emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Scholars studying a range of organizations were influenced by, among other things, the observations of Victor Fuchs (see Figure 1). Fuchs authored a report issued by the National Bureau of Economic Research that documented a significant growth in service organizations within the economy. In the report, Fuchs (1968) noted,

> Productivity in education, as every teacher knows, is determined largely by what the student contributes and, to take an extreme case, the performance of a string quartet can be affected by the audience's response. Thus, we see that productivity in service industries is dependent in part on the knowledge, experience and motivation of the consumer. (p. 195)
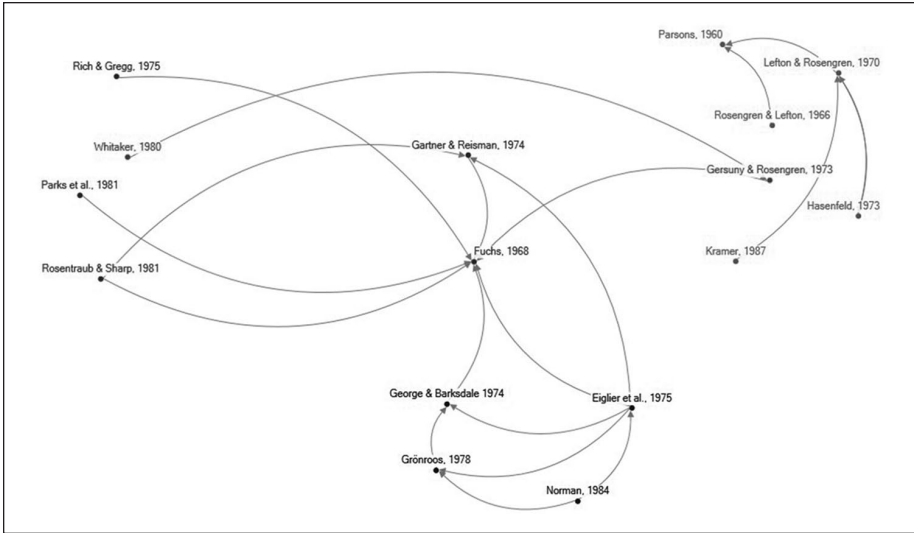
Figure 1. The service society: common influences and early observations across fields.
Note. This figure is not comprehensive, but highlights some of the key sources consulted and their relationships.

Here I describe how three fields took up this idea. Below, I summarize each field's central concerns, trace how these ideas evolved over time, and consider the implications for our understanding of NPOs today.

Coproduction: Contribution of Beneficiaries

In the mid-1970s, political economist Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues were studying urban policing and used the term *coproduction* to call attention to how citizens were not passive recipients of services but were active contributors to the service process and ultimately to service outcomes (V. Ostrom & Ostrom, 1977; Parks et al., 1981; Rich & Gregg, 1975). These observations grew out of a series of pathbreaking studies, where Ostrom and her colleagues found that decentralized policing was more effective than centralized policing in part because it enabled citizens to participate more actively in helping police address crime (V. Ostrom & Bish, 1977; V. Ostrom & Ostrom, 1971, 1977; Parks et al., 1981; Rosentraub & Sharp, 1981; Sharp, 1980; Whitaker, 1980). These scholars saw coproduction as an alternative form of citizen participation, distinct from advocacy and protest (Sharp, 1978) and, relatedly, as a way of addressing allocation problems associated with the provision of public goods (see Rich & Gregg, 1975). For the next several years, coproduction garnered considerable interest as scholars applied the concept to human services, fire prevention, emergency medical services, neighborhood development, and urban infrastructure (Brudney & England, 1983).

Two primary questions animated this research. First, what institutional arrangements encourage coproduction? For example, Whitaker (1976) suggested that larger organizations were less responsive to intended beneficiaries and therefore less likely to encourage coproduction because of greater routinization and less contact between staff and beneficiaries. Second, what is the optimal combination of the efforts of regular producers and coproducers to achieve outcomes and reduce costs? For example, public management scholars used what economists call production functions—which look at the different combinations of inputs needed to produce different levels of output to determine the most efficient combination of inputs—to consider whether regular producer input could be substituted with citizens' input (Brudney, 1984; E. Ostrom, 1996; Parks et al., 1981).[2]

By the 1990s, interest in coproduction among public management scholars in the United States died down, as policy discussions turned to privatization and new public management (Alford, 2009). But around the early 2000s, the idea of coproduction experienced a resurgence among policymakers and scholars in Australia and Europe, in part because it provided an appealing alternative to the limits of new public management (Brandsen et al. 2018). Since that time, the literature on coproduction has mushroomed to examine a range of questions, including: (a) citizens' motivations and capacities for coproduction (Alford, 2009; van Eijk & Gascó, 2018); (b) whether coproduction results in better outcomes (e.g., empowerment, trust, and enhanced service quality) or has unintended costs (e.g., exacerbating inequality and greater staff burden) (Jo & Nabatchi, 2018; Loeffler & Bovaird, 2018; Verschuere et al., 2018); as well as (c) the conditions that make coproduction effective, including different staff and leadership skills (Steen & Tuurnas, 2018), accessibility of services (Pestoff, 2012), and the advent of new technologies (Lember, 2018). Importantly, public management scholars have also started to apply these ideas to NPOs, a point I return to in the final discussion (see Pestoff & Brandsen, 2008; Pestoff et al., 2013).

For nonprofit scholars, the literature on coproduction illuminates a variety of ways that beneficiaries contribute to the service process and how dependent nonprofits are on their contribution for achieving desired outcomes. Some of these contributions are intended, where, for example, beneficiaries provide information about themselves to staff or participate actively in workshops; but some contributions happen informally, when, for example, beneficiaries help one another with job connections, cheer each other on before a speech, or show new staff and volunteers how things work. The coproduction literature also reminds us that these contributions are not confined to the four walls of the organization (e.g., not only do students complete homework in the classroom but they also complete homework at home). Finally, the coproduction literature reminds us that the institutional design of a nonprofit initiative can affect this contribution.

Cocreation of Value[3]: Experience of Beneficiaries

Like their contemporaries in other fields, marketing scholars noticed the rising number of service organizations and the need to articulate the value of those organizations. Many

of these scholars had close ties to business and realized the inadequacy of the traditional marketing concepts that had been used for goods (Berry & Parasuraman, 1993; George & Barksdale, 1974; Grönroos, 1978; Shostack, 1977). And like their contemporaries, they noted that beneficiaries participated in the production as well as in the consumption of services. They even suggested that beneficiaries became partial employees (Mills & Morris, 1986) and as such needed to be managed (Normann, 1984). These early scholars worked to identify the distinct characteristics of services compared to goods, including intangibility of services, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity, and perishability (see Edvardsson et al., 2005, for a review).

As the number of researchers interested in these questions grew, a new field of service marketing and service management emerged (see Berry & Parasuraman, 1993). Three concepts have been central to the discussions in this field: service, coproduction, and creation of value. Given my purpose here, I focus on the *creation of value* concept. Broadly speaking, service management scholars use the term *value* to refer to how beneficiaries are better and/or worse off as a result their service experience (Grönroos, 2011, p. 282). Historically, marketing scholars viewed value as embedded in a product or service, captured in the price, and delivered to an intended beneficiary (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Today service management scholars view value differently: instead of viewing the service as inherently valuable, they argue that value is determined by the beneficiary in the course of their experience with the organization and as they integrate their experience of the service into their lives.

Service management scholars have given considerable attention to the dimensions of a service that would result in value cocreation or destruction, including beneficiaries' experience of staff, peers, and the physical environment of the organization. They have also considered how this value cocreation is shaped by the beneficiaries': (a) previous experiences; (b) expectations for the current service; (c) future experiences, including how they use the service in their life (value-in-use); and (d) how they might integrate this with other people and organizations in their life (value in context) to get the result they desire (Grönroos, 2008; Heinonen et al., 2010; Osborne et al., 2018; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

From the service management perspective, then, beneficiaries participate in the coproduction process of the organization, and the organization participates in the value cocreation process of the beneficiary (see Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Osborne, 2018). Osborne et al. (2018, pp. 21–22) extend these ideas to public services, articulating three types of value for beneficiaries: a change in one's immediate welfare, a change in one's well-being, and an improvement in one's capacity to address a similar issue in the future.

These ideas about value cocreation help nonprofit researchers understand that beneficiaries' experiences in organizations, not just in programs or services, affects beneficiaries in intended and unintended ways that have implications for social impact. To this point, this literature suggests that if we want to understand nonprofit impact we cannot rely on intended outcomes. Rather we need to consider the full constellation of beneficiaries' experiences in the nonprofit. Perhaps more fundamentally, the service management literature moves us from examining how beneficiaries contribute to

service delivery and service outcomes, as defined by the organization, to examining how the experience of participating in nonprofits impacts them in the context of their lives. As nonprofit researchers, we know that for volunteers, participating in the organization affects them beyond what they may learn about a given program, that is, building their capacity to participate in public life. Service management scholars suggest we should expect that participating in the organization also affects beneficiaries, although with different consequences. For example, we might consider how asking for private information in organizational spaces that are open to others, locating organizations in inviting houses, or using bullet proof glass in reception areas, shapes not only beneficiaries' immediate experiences participating in the nonprofit but also the longer-term consequences of such experiences, particularly if these experiences accumulate over time.

Partial Membership: Authority of Beneficiaries

In the 1950s and 1960s, sociologists who studied hospitals, schools, mental institutions, and other human service organizations suggested these organizations were not well explained using existing approaches to organizational analysis (Lefton & Rosengren, 1966, p. 802). Unlike the public management scholars, who were concerned about government fiscal stress and how to best provide public services, these sociologists were interested in the rise of a particular type of formal organization, one that seemed to be replacing family and community in meeting nonmaterial needs and socializing people in everyday matters. In these organizations, scholars observed, beneficiaries were "partial members" of these organizations and the more extensive their membership, that is, the greater the equality between the beneficiary and organization, the more the beneficiary would commit, contribute and get involved in the organization, ultimately affecting the structure, functioning and goals of the organization (Hasenfeld & English, 1974; Parsons, 1961; Rosengren & Lefton, 1970). They also suggested that the more beneficiaries are taken into the organization as full members, the more the organization changes from a client-serving organization to a completely voluntary organization (Rosengren & Lefton, 1970, p. 119).

A central question for these scholars, then, was how this particular type of bureaucratic organization used control strategies for managing beneficiaries, as with employees, in order to achieve its goals. For example, Gersuny and Rosengren (1973) suggested organizations use specific language to socialize beneficiaries into the organization: "Both the recruitment of consumers and securing their compliance as coproducers involves the use of rhetoric [. . .]" (p. 1). More broadly, scholars theorized that organizations would use different control strategies depending on the length of the relationship with the beneficiary and how much of the beneficiary's life the organization engaged (Lefton & Rosengren, 1966). Organizations that had longer-term relationships would need to rely more on socialization than rules to garner the beneficiary's commitment; the more difficult it was to secure this commitment, the more the organization would use strategies to create equality between itself and the beneficiary (Parsons, 1970).

These ideas influenced social work scholars as they identified how human service organizations differed from other types of bureaucracies (Hasenfeld, 1983; Hasenfeld & English, 1974; Kramer, 1987). They noted the varied and active role of beneficiaries in these organizations: as service recipients, organizational members and the raw material to be changed by the organization. This in turn led them to articulate unique features of these organizations, including: the centrality of the beneficiary–staff relationship, goal ambiguity, and an indeterminant technology, where service provision cannot be fully known or specified because the technology is dependent on what beneficiaries do (Hasenfeld, 1983; Lipsky, 1980). Consequently, these organizations use strategies to manage this indeterminacy. For example, they may assign new identities to beneficiaries through categorization processes that sort and "treat" them (Hasenfeld & English, 1974). But these scholars also considered beneficiaries and organizations as interdependent systems, each trying to optimize interests and minimize costs (Hasenfeld, 1978, p. 194), and they predicted that a beneficiary's trust in the organization and buy-in to its goals would be greater under conditions where there was greater equality in organization–beneficiary relationship (Hasenfeld & English, 1974, p. 469).

In the contemporary literature on human service organizations, the idea of beneficiaries as organizational members is not evident, as the focus has shifted from the *organization*–beneficiary relationship to the *staff*–beneficiary relationship, but themes of power, equity, and control have remained prominent.[4] These themes are discussed against a backdrop of two noteworthy trends in human services: the increasing scope of beneficiary control, or authority, within human services and the challenges to professional expertise (Gubrium, 2016, p. 12). Here, scholars raise concerns that efforts to enhance beneficiary power in human services are really repackaged ways for organizations to manage and control beneficiaries, but they also offer guidance for ensuring that beneficiary power is real, meaningful, and in beneficiaries' interests (e.g., Darling, 2000; Hunter & Ritchie, 2007).

For nonprofit scholars, this literature suggests that beneficiaries' participation and authority in the organization can vary and that this has implications for the structure and functioning of the organization, not just the service delivery process. For example, beneficiaries in human service organizations can sit on boards, volunteer, and participate alongside staff in running organizations (see Benjamin, 2018; Guo et al., 2014). In member-based organizations, members can play minor roles with staff making most of the decisions, or members might run the organization with no paid staff but where some members have leadership roles and more authority. This literature suggests that the varying levels of beneficiary authority will matter for managing and leading these organizations. For example, in nonprofits, we might consider how leading an organization where beneficiaries take on leadership roles, where they volunteer or are hired as staff, is different from leading an organization where they do not have these roles.

Summary

This review shows how scholars in three separate fields arrived at a common core insight: that beneficiaries are organizational actors whose participation matters for the

organization. With this insight in hand, they made many similar observations. But this review also highlights how scholars in these fields focused on different consequences of this participation. The coproduction literature considered how this participation was an essential contribution to service delivery and service outcomes. The value cocreation literature considered how this participation might be experienced as positive or negative by beneficiaries, affecting ultimate outcomes. The sociology and social work literature considered how the extent of this participation—specifically the degree of equality between the client and the organization, that is, the clients' authority, would affect not only the clients commitment, contribution, and participation but also the structure and functioning of the organization.

Beneficiaries in NPM

Taken together, the three literatures summarized above recognize that beneficiaries are not simply external stakeholders who receive services but are critical organizational actors. In spite of this recognition that beneficiaries play important roles in organizations, we do not seem to be preparing nonprofit leaders to understand how their participation affects the structure, functioning, and ultimate impact of NPOs. A review of 57 texts identified through WorldCat and published in English between 1990 and 2014, found that 18 (32%) referenced beneficiaries (or a related term) in the table of contents, with 44% of these 18 books mentioning beneficiaries under marketing and 33% mentioning beneficiaries under evaluation. Reviewing the indexes of these books reveals similar results. Of the 22 books that had indexes, 12 (36%) of the books discussed beneficiaries in marketing chapters, 6 (18%) in governance chapters and 5 (15%) in evaluation chapters. Although the tables of contents and indexes are imperfect proxies for how well we are preparing nonprofit leaders to understand beneficiaries' roles in their organizations and may miss other types of material educators use in the classroom, this analysis raises the question: why aren't beneficiaries more central to NPM education?

NPM as a distinct field of study emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s in response to a growing number of NPOs in the United States (Middleton, 1986; O'Neill, 2005; Smith, 2003; Young, 1991). As researchers became interested in these organizations and more universities created courses and established centers and programs, scholars and practitioners discussed the content of NPM curriculum (Ashcraft, 2007; Burlingame & Hammack, 2005; DiMaggio, 1988; Mirabella et al., 2007; O'Neill & Fletcher, 1998; O'Neill & Young, 1988; Young, 2005). Three dominant concerns are evident in these discussions and help us understand why beneficiaries were not central in these conversations.

First, participants in these discussions considered whether managing a nonprofit was distinct from managing firms or government agencies. The central question for these scholars was: Do nonprofits merit a separate curriculum? For example, they observed that nonprofits had diverse revenue sources and relied on both professional and volunteer staff, and noted the central role of values in orienting these organizations (O'Neill & Young, 1988, pp. 4–8). Second, they considered whether it even made

sense to discuss "nonprofit" management generically—how could managing a multi-million-dollar university be similar to managing a nonprofit with five paid staff?—and concluded that generic management knowledge would likely be insufficient (Cook, 1988; DiMaggio, 1988; O'Neill & Young, 1998, pp. 9–11). Third, they also considered the distinct management issues that arise when NPOs evolve from all-volunteer-run organizations to formal professionalized organizations. For example, an executive director might have trouble exercising authority because volunteers would be used to having significant decision-making power within the organization.

Since that time, the curriculum has evolved to reflect concerns and interests of researchers and practitioners. For example, early on Brudney and Stringer (1998) pointed out that little attention was being given to volunteers, and today's texts include chapters on volunteer management (see also Brudney & Kluesner, 1992). We also see a growing number of programs offering courses on social entrepreneurship, and textbooks with new chapters on accountability and social impact (Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & Eikenberry, 2017; Paton et al., 2007). More recently, scholars have drawn on critical theory to help students understand how hidden social structures show up in nonprofits, leading to inequity and oppression, and how nonprofit leaders can work to understand and address such issues (Eikenberry et al., 2019).

But beneficiaries were never a central focus in these discussions. On one hand, this seems puzzling when we consider the attention beneficiaries received in other management literatures, and how scholars associated with these other management fields made distinct contributions to the emerging literature on NPOs. For example, in 1978 and then again in 1987, *JVAR* published two special issues on coproduction (e.g., E. Ostrom, 1978; Sharp, 1978; Sundeen & Siegel, 1987). Yet the concept of coproduction was "largely cited only by Workshop scholars, which suggests little integration of Ostrom's contribution to nonprofit studies despite the conceptual overlap" (Bushouse et al., 2016, p. 10S). Similarly, Kramer, a social welfare scholar and early contributor to nonprofit research, suggested that what made nonprofits distinct was not volunteerism but rather consumerism, the active role of the clientele in organizational policymaking (Kramer, 1987, p. 251). Interestingly, he cited the early work in sociology on "clients as partial members." But even though Kramer's work is foundational in the nonprofit scholarship, this particular idea—that what makes nonprofits distinct is the active role of consumers in the policymaking of the organization—has not garnered much attention.

On the other hand, the limited attention to beneficiaries in the early discussions about NPM is not surprising for several reasons. First, scholars were focused on the distinctiveness of nonprofits, and it seems likely that beneficiaries were not considered a unique feature of nonprofits but rather something that reflected professionalized organizations similar to those in other fields (see O'Neill & Fletcher, 1998; O'Neill & Young, 1988). Second, the institutionalization of the field of NPM occurred after the interest in the role of beneficiaries in organizations, particularly in public management and human service management, seemed to wane (Alford, 2009). Finally, the early focus of AVAS and its journal *JVAR* on voluntary action, meant that when the idea of coproduction was introduced, it was associated with the participation of voluntary

associations in municipal services, not that of beneficiaries in NPOs. Given the limited attention to beneficiaries in NPM texts and the observations made by management scholars in other fields, I turned to more recent nonprofit research to see what it suggested about NPO beneficiaries as organizational actors.

Current Research on Nonprofits: Beneficiaries as Organizational Actors[5]

To understand the current state of research on nonprofit beneficiaries, I reviewed empirical studies published in three major nonprofit journals between 1998 and 2018 (*NVSQ*, *NM&L*, and *Voluntas*). Although these three journals are not inclusive of all nonprofit research, reviewing research published in these journals does provides an initial test of the relevance of these ideas for nonprofits, which is my purpose here. Of the 2,674 articles published in these three journals during that period, 310 (12%) mentioned beneficiary or a related term in the abstract, title, or keywords. After eliminating articles that were nonempirical or where the term did not refer to NPO beneficiaries (e.g., "client" referred to an organization), 130 articles remained (5% of the total articles published). I reviewed and coded these 130 articles. As my central questions focused on beneficiaries inside the organization, I report on a subset of these articles that either collected data from beneficiaries or reported findings about beneficiaries inside the organization ($N = 60$) (See the Supplemental Appendix for the methodology).

I coded these 60 articles to answer three questions: (a) Did the article provide information about how beneficiaries contribute to the NPO or the importance of their contribution to the NPOs operation (*coproduction*)? (b) Did the article provide information about how participating in the NPO impacted beneficiaries' experience, beyond any intended outcomes (*cocreation*)? (c) Did the article provide information about the varying levels of authority beneficiaries had in the NPO (*partial membership*)? Most articles did not use these concepts, nor did the researchers set out to answer these three questions. Even so, 46 (77%) of the 60 articles provided evidence in the detailed findings that these ideas are relevant for understanding nonprofits. I give examples below.

Coproduction. How Beneficiaries Contribute to NPOs

The concept of coproduction suggests, we need to recognize that beneficiaries are agents of change who make contributions to the initiatives they participate in and that these contributions are critical for intended outcomes. Over 50% of the 60 articles examined, or 32 articles, provided evidence that beneficiaries contributed in small and big ways to the NPOs studied. Sometimes these contributions were programmatically scripted (Cooney, 2006; Hustinx & De Waele, 2015; Thøgersen, 2015); other times these roles were pragmatic adaptions for the organization (Netting et al., 2005). This research suggests that the contributions of beneficiaries also have implications for the management of NPOs (Benjamin & Campbell, 2015; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Ewert & Evers, 2014; Pestoff, 2012; Vamstad, 2012).

For example, Netting et al. (2005) reported how beneficiaries in faith-based social service organizations played a variety of roles (e.g., volunteering, helping with evaluation, and coordination). As a result, the beneficiaries identified themselves as collaborators, not recipients or clients, something that was surprising even to the researchers. The authors suggested that this had implications for managing professional and personal boundaries among staff and clients, as clients saw staff as friends and "like family." In another study of arts organizations working with disabled artists, the researchers found that the artists built their own media platforms and advocated for their work as well as that of their peers (Onyx et al., 2018, p. 585). Beneficiaries' support for each other was evident in many articles, (Markström & Karlsson, 2013; Vu et al., 2017). Carnochan et al. (2014) provided a more fine-grained example of how NPOs are dependent on the contribution of beneficiaries. Here, they showed how human service organizations depend on beneficiaries for accurate data that ultimately affects their measured performance. In member-based NPOs, one might assume that coproduction is built into the DNA of the organization, since members work together to address a problem that affects them, but the research also shows that what beneficiaries do and how they contribute varies within and across member-based organizations (Bonell & Hilton, 2002; Carmin & Jehlička, 2005).

Value Cocreation: How Beneficiaries Experience NPOs

The literature on value cocreation suggests the impact of NPOs on beneficiaries is not confined to intended outcomes but rather encompasses their total experience in the organization. These experiences can be missed in evaluations of intended program outcomes. The research reviewed here provides some evidence that looking comprehensively at beneficiaries' experience in NPOs would shed more light on the impact of NPOs on beneficiaries. Of the 60 articles examined, 25 (41.6 %) provided some evidence of beneficiaries' experience in the NPO, beyond intended outcomes. This research shows that these experiences are affected by interactions with staff, volunteers, and other beneficiaries. Indeed, a few of the articles set out to offer alternative evaluation frameworks that encompass more than intended outcomes (Onyx et al., 2018; Walk et al., 2015).

For example, Sager and Stephens (2005) found in their study of faith-based meal providers that homeless recipients felt talked down to by volunteers who told them to wait across the street. Dodd and Nelson (2018) found that intake procedures had similar *consequences*: "It's wrong what they are doing there. It's like 'No! Stay back. You're not poor enough.' If I have worked up the courage to come to this place, and humble myself, then yes, I need to be here" (n.p.). This negative experience is something service management scholars call value destruction (c.f., Grönroos, 2011). Eliasoph's (2009) study of youth empowerment programs shows how even in organizations where beneficiaries have more say, value destruction is evident. She described how plug-in volunteering opportunities were detrimental to the youth: volunteers gave youth conflicting advice on how to approach their homework assignments. Consequently, the more studious youth hid from volunteers who wanted to "help

them" get their homework done. Cooney (2006) showed how a social enterprise that employed beneficiaries gave them work that would not disrupt production flows, with the result that "[a]lmost all the interviews with beneficiaries reveal their angst at being relegated in the back of the store and a concern that they are not getting a full range of training" (p. 155). Even in member NPOs, the participation experience matters. van Eijk (2018) found that residents in neighborhood watch schemes wanted to be appreciated for their contributions by other members and, more importantly, by professionals (in this case, municipal police officers).

Partial Membership: How Beneficiaries' Authority Varies Across NPOs

The early literature on human service organizations suggests that beneficiaries may be more or less central members in these organizations. The more central their membership, the more the organization resembles a voluntary association. This insight implies that rather than seeing nonprofits as professionalized, where beneficiaries have little or no authority, or as member-based organizations, where beneficiaries are equal members in the NPOs, a more fruitful analytical path would be to consider nonprofits along a continuum of beneficiary membership, and then to ask what it takes to lead NPOs depending on where they fall along the continuum. Current research confirms that the authority of beneficiaries in NPOs varies and that it has implications for both the NPO and the beneficiaries themselves. In the 60 articles reviewed for this analysis, 27 (45%) have evidence of partial membership. For nonmember NPOs, the articles showed evidence that beneficiaries played more central roles in the organization and/or had some authority within the organization, whether or not this authority was adequately recognized. For member-based organizations, the articles provided evidence that members did not all share equal authority; this was most obvious in member-based organizations with paid staff, but was also apparent in organizations where some members assumed leadership roles.

For example, Hustinx and De Waele (2015) examined a social grocery, an initiative of a larger social justice organization, intended to reduce poverty through participatory "bottom-up inspired service delivery . . . by people living in poverty, to people living in poverty" (p. 1673). They found that conflicting logics between commercial and participatory goals created conflicts for professional staff, which they resolved in ways that undermined the participation of the poor who worked and volunteered. In another study of an HIV/AIDs user-led service organization, Bonell and Hilton (2002) described a member-based organization where members had a great deal of authority, including electing the board, but where there was still a certain amount of top-down direction from the founder and the paid managers in planning projects (p. 27). Dodge and Ospina (2016) showed how two grassroots member-based environmental organizations, who also employed paid staff, were able to guard against staff exercising authority over members by employing practices that ensured the staff took direction from the members. These examples illustrate how beneficiary authority varies in all kinds of nonprofits, with important consequences.

Taken together, this research suggests that beneficiary participation matters and has implications for managing and leading nonprofits, including: managing staff (Dodge & Ospina, 2016; Netting et al., 2005; Vamstad, 2012); managing volunteers (Bonell & Hilton, 2002; Eliasoph, 2009); managing operations, like work flows and quality control (Cooney, 2006; Hustinx & De Waele, 2015); as well as evaluating performance (Benjamin & Campbell, 2015; Carnochan et al., 2014). This research also suggests that beneficiaries' roles in organizations have implications for the governance of the organization. Several articles illustrate the complexities that arise when beneficiaries have greater authority in the organization itself (Bonell & Hilton, 2002; Fassin et al., 2017; Thøgersen, 2015; Wellens & Jegers, 2016).

These findings are noteworthy when we consider that a majority of the researchers did not explicitly use the central concepts discussed in earlier sections of this article, nor did they set out to specifically examine the questions they raise. Instead, the significance of beneficiaries as organizational actors emerges in the detailed findings. Moreover, the ideas seem to have purchase for a variety of nonprofits: traditional human service organizations, social enterprises, community-based environmental groups, youth empowerment, arts organizations, and so on. A research program that sets out to directly examine beneficiaries in a wide variety of nonprofits, and how their participation affects what it takes to lead and manage these organizations, would go a long way toward rounding out the picture. I turn to this research agenda next.

Bringing Beneficiaries More Centrally Into Nonprofit Management Education and Research: Considerations and Next Steps

The analysis presented above suggests that beneficiaries are not simply external stakeholders but are important organizational actors whose participation matters for managing and leading a nonprofit. In leveraging the analytical insights from these three concepts—coproduction, cocreation, and partial membership—we would be short-sighted to simply adopt them to create new lines of research. These concepts have been developed in management fields closely related to NPM, but NPM and leadership brings under its umbrella an arguably more diverse set of organizations not only in terms of their end goals—instrumental and expressive—but also in terms of the roles of beneficiaries in these organizations: sometimes leaders, volunteers, members, paid workers, representatives, as well as recipients. Consequently, the goal should be to draw on these ideas as useful analytical frames, but initial studies should seek to understand the nonprofit–beneficiary relationship on its own terms. At the same time, we will want to pay attention to how these ideas may have more or less purchase in different kinds of nonprofits: arts, human service, environmental, animal welfare, and so on.

Against this backdrop, I suggest three avenues for future research. First, to fully understand beneficiaries in nonprofits, we need to fully account for their contributions and how they impact nonprofit operations and governance. Starting with the insights from the coproduction literature, it would help us understand, among other things, that

beneficiaries may have different motivations and capacities for contributing (see Alford, 2009; van Eijk & Gascó, 2018); and that staff need to know how to partner with beneficiaries, requiring leaders to balance unequal power in the organization (Schlappa & Imani, 2018) as well as the role of technology in facilitating coproduction. But we might also consider how their contributions to nonprofits may be distinct. For example, in many nonprofit settings staff and volunteer turnover is high. Depending on the nonprofit, beneficiaries are sometimes in the position of "training" staff about "how things work" in the organization, about the nature of the issue, or about the larger environment, such as the neighborhood or the social service system.

Second, we need to understand how nonprofits impact beneficiaries in ways that go beyond intended outcomes of a given social change initiative, to consider how the participation process itself also impacts beneficiaries. Here we can start with the insights of the service management literature, which suggest that we need to look at everything from the physical setting, to beneficiaries' interactions with peers, to their interactions with staff, along with what they are asked to do in these organizations. For example, we might consider if and how the diverse physical environments of nonprofits shape beneficiaries' experiences—everything from church basements, to houses, to warehouses, and formal office buildings. We know from research in other fields that physical space can convey a sense of status in the world that matters for one's experience (Berens, 2017; Sapolsky, 2005).

Finally, we need good research on how to manage organizations with different kinds and levels of beneficiary authority. Taking our cues from the early literature in sociology and the current human service literature as well as existing literature on nonprofits, we can start to examine the particular issues and dilemmas that emerge for staff and leaders in organizations where beneficiaries are more or less central to the operation and governance of the organization and consequently have more or less authority (Bordt, 1997; Chen, 2009; Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2006). For example, we might consider what happens when beneficiaries are hired as staff in nonprofits, whether this is in a social enterprise where the employment is intended to be part of the program, or in other settings where beneficiaries become leaders, or where they are simply hired as advocates or staff with lived experience. More recent research suggests that the greater the influence beneficiaries have in the nonprofit, the greater the nonprofit's effectiveness (Valeau et al., 2019).

Conclusion

The analysis presented here calls on us to recognize that beneficiaries are not simply external stakeholders who are the target of some program or service, but as central organizational actors. The literature in public management, service management, and human service management suggests we will better understand these nonprofits, what it takes to lead them and their ultimate impact, by looking more fully at beneficiaries in this way. More specifically, these literatures call us to reconsider nonprofits in three important respects. First, they direct attention to the contributions beneficiaries make to organizations and to the change process, correcting a tendency to view nonprofits as

the primary drivers of change and to credit success to them. Second, these literatures enlarge the frame for understanding the impact of nonprofits on beneficiaries beyond intended program outcomes to consider how the full range of experiences navigating these organizations. Third, these literatures invite us to reconceptualize NPOs, not as places where beneficiaries either do or do not have full membership and authority, but rather as falling somewhere along a continuum, with different implications for leadership. Even though these calls originate in other management literatures, the analysis of empirical studies published in three nonprofit journals presented above suggests that recognizing beneficiaries as organizational actors will help us better prepare future nonprofit leaders.

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Supplementary Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1.   The total number of articles in the three nonprofit journals with coproduction in the title, abstract, or keywords is 34 (14 in *NVSQ* and 20 in *Voluntas*). Seven of these used the term

coproduction to refer to beneficiaries in nonprofits, with the remaining 27 using the term to refer to the participation of volunteers, voluntary associations and the third sector in government service provision. Of the seven, only five showed up in the nonprofit journal search for beneficiary terms in title, keyword, or abstract. In addition, if one considered all articles about member-based nonprofits to be about beneficiaries, then the number of articles about beneficiaries would be much higher, but I did not make an assumption that member is a synonym for beneficiary for several reasons (e.g., some countries require all nonprofits to be registered as member organizations regardless of who they serve, many member-based organizations are members where the intended beneficiaries are separate population.)

2. Ostroms and other scholars associated with the Workshop did not use the term public as a synonym for government but rather to refer broadly to public problems in which a variety of formal and informal organizations can and do contribute to addressing these problems. As public choice theorists, one of their concerns was expanding the notion of government and public beyond government agencies (see McGinnis, 2011).

3. Both public management and service management scholars use the concept of coproduction and cocreation. However, unlike public management scholars today, service management scholars see coproduction as inherent in the service process rather than something that is designed into services (Osborne et al., 2018, p. 18) and use the terms *cocreation of value* or *value cocreation* to refer to how the service organization contributes to the beneficiaries' value creation process (see Grönroos, 2008). Other than Osborne and his colleagues, public management scholars have not picked up on this useful distinction.

4. Hasenfeld's early books included chapters on clients as partial organizational members. His later works did not (see Hasenfeld, 1983, 1992, 2010; Hasenfeld & English, 1974).

5. This literature search, although systematic, does not include all articles relevant for understanding beneficiaries in nonprofits. For example, the search likely missed some member-based articles where the members were also the intended beneficiaries of the organization. I did not use member as a search term because it would have generated a large number of articles about volunteer members who were not beneficiaries, including board members.

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