

Innovation and exnovation in public services

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Centre for Policing Research and Learning
Annual Conference, October 2019



The Open
University



Aims of this session

- What is innovation – and exnovation
- The varied relationships between innovation and improvement
- Why success can include killing off innovations
- Features of success and failure in public services innovation

Innovation: “The word that would be king”

Osborne and Brown (2011)

- Innovation – “the new imperative” (Chesbrough, 2003)
- “Innovate or die” (attributed to Peter Drucker)
- “With public services budgets stretched greater than ever, there is a growing need for innovative solutions” – Blue Light Innovation Summit 2019
- Innovations in American Government aims to restore trust and confidence in government (Rizvi, 2008)

Who can be against something which is new, shiny, modern and different?

Innovation gets everywhere....



On the other hand:

- Is it simply “policy chic” (Behn, 1997)
- The general topic of innovation has inspired vast amounts of research, theorizing, **speculation, and wishful thinking** (Kimberly, 1981).
- Innovation – is it just a buzz word to deodorise tired institutions or act as a decoy for cuts?

Defining innovation

- New ideas and practices which are implemented (i.e. not just invention) (Bessant, 2005)
- Disruptive or step-change. (Lynn, 1997; Osborne and Brown, 2005; Hartley, 2005). Create new practices or new mindsets, break with established practices. It is not the same as continuous improvement.
- Not just technologies but practices and ways of providing services.
- Its innovative if it's new to the organization.
- Innovations do NOT necessarily need to be successful (Borins, 2008)



Dimensions of innovation in public services (Hartley, 2005)

- Service innovation
- Product
- Process
- Position
- Strategic
- Governance
- Rhetorical

Many innovations involve more than one dimension

Three phases of innovation



Innovation and improvement



“Innovation and improvement” is not a single concept, though often treated like that in policy.

Success and failure have varied relationships with innovation

Some policing innovations which failed:



Some innovation failures which later became successes



Some innovations start a success and change over time



Different stakeholders may value innovation differently

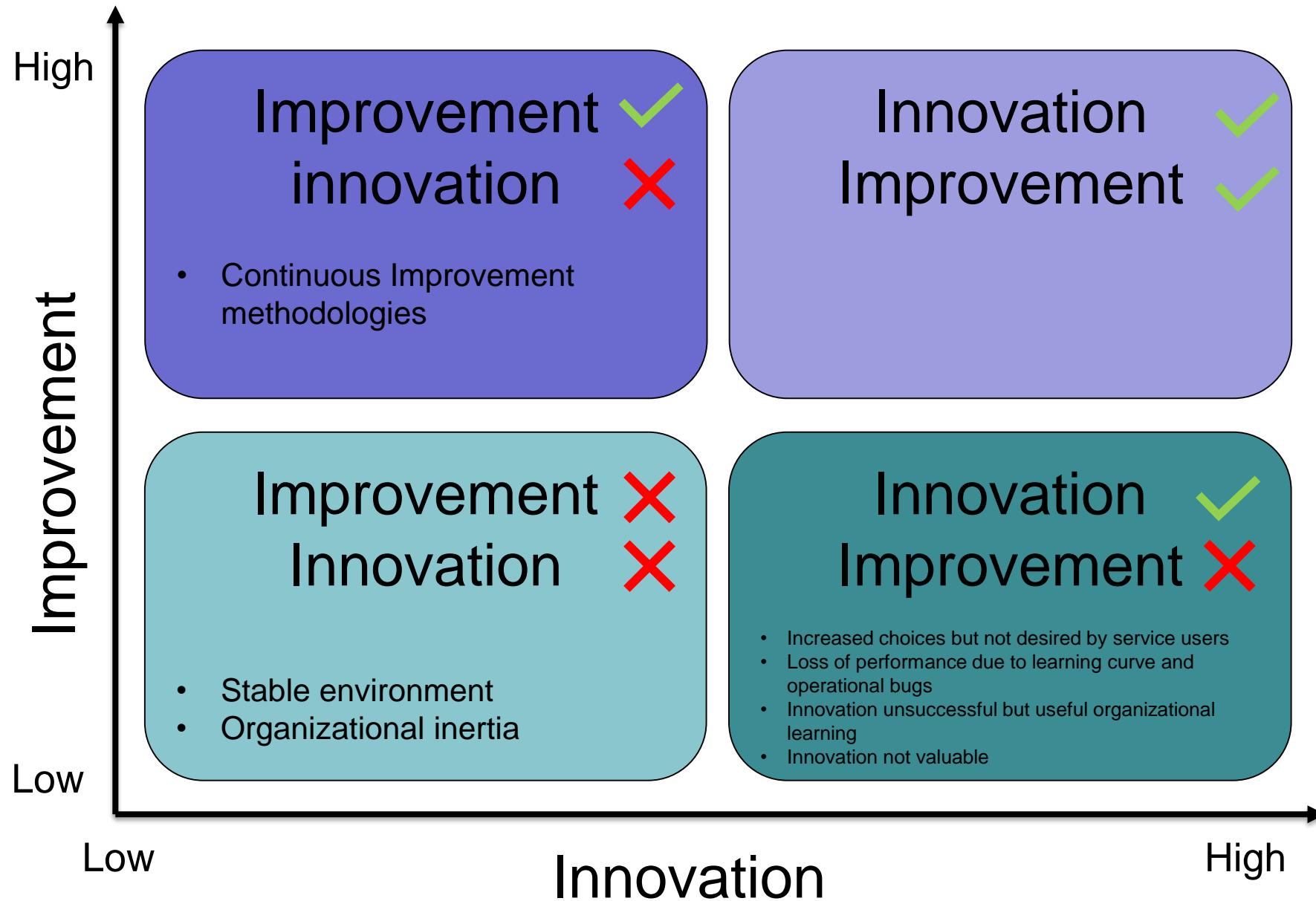


Myth-buster: Public organizations are no good at innovation



Many of the features of a smart phone
were invented by the public sector
GPS; internet, touch-screen; micro-chip, siri
(noted by Mazzucato (2013) The entrepreneurial state)





What to do when an innovation does not lead to success?

- “Doomed to success” - keep going anyway. Most people know it’s not valuable but hard to change it. “Like killing puppies”. It is someone’s pet project/too much resource has been invested (escalating commitment, Staw, 1976 “Knee deep in the big muddy”)
- “Anti-termination coalitions” (Bardach, 1976) – too many benefit from the dysfunctional policy/practice.
- Quietly put it aside – (best value anyone?)
- Archeological layers – new language or new practices brought in without earlier innovations being withdrawn.
Eg Total Place becomes Community Budgets.

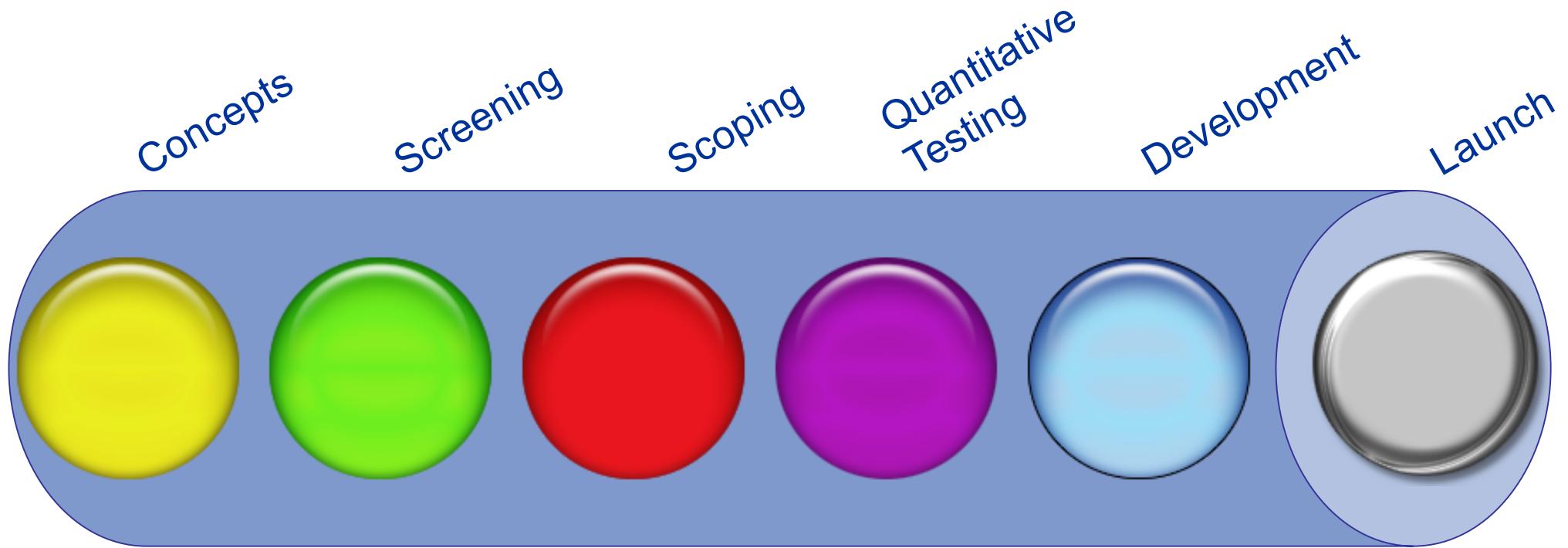
A deliberate decision: exnovation

Kimberly (1981) “*the process whereby an organization decides to divest itself of an innovation that it had previously adopted.*”

Exnovation processes

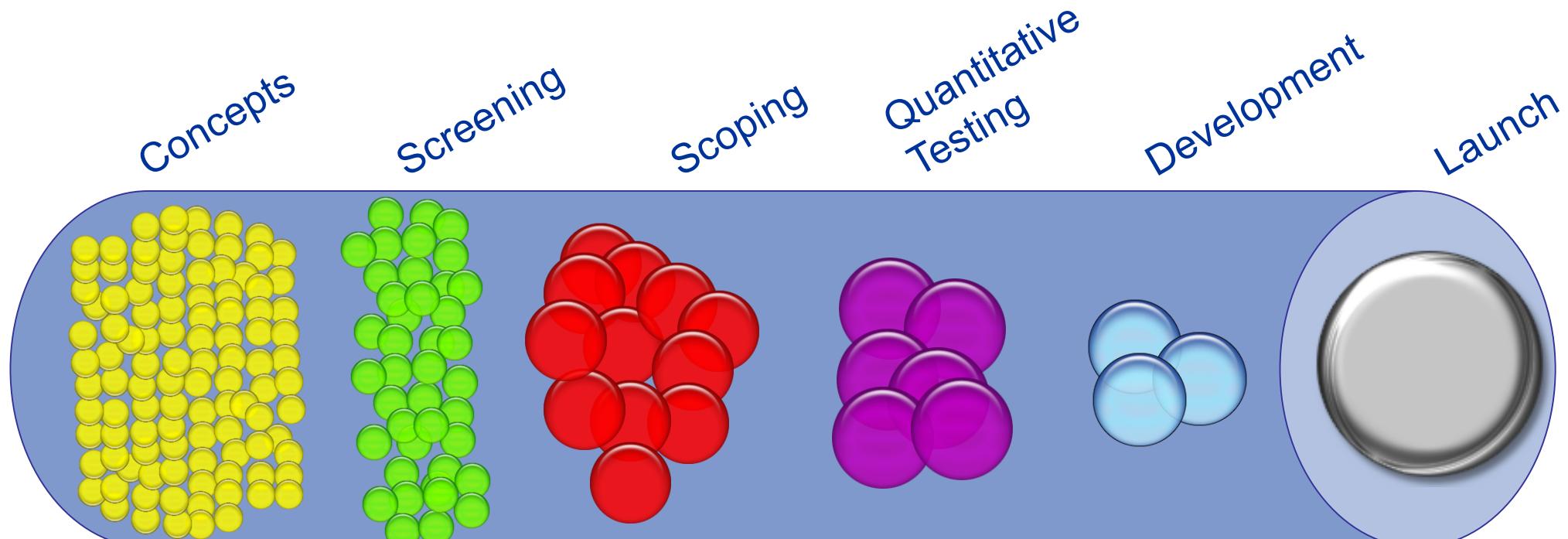
- Stage/gate models (Cooper, 1988) help to identify key decisions at each stage
- Help to identify key barriers at each stage (Albury, 2005)
- Help to decide whether to end an innovation
- Reminds us that “*Studies of product innovation consistently point to a high level of failure to progress from original idea to successful product in the marketplace.... Actual figures range from 30% to as high as 95%; an accepted average is 38%*” (Tidd and Bessant, 2018).

Example: Camelot: “We actively manage the ideas pipeline”



Ensuring a steady flow of ideas

Stage-gate



One success may need 100 original ideas

But.....

- “Stages” may be an overly rational approach to innovation
- Emergent aspects of innovation
- Cyclical and iterative aspects of innovation
- “The innovation journey” – van der Ven 1986 – opportunism as well as planning – and lots of negotiation
- In public services, adoption of innovation may precede development of the idea (e.g. policy announcements)
- Rhetorical innovation by politicians may be used to build support for new practices among external stakeholders i.e. innovation not just an internal organizational process

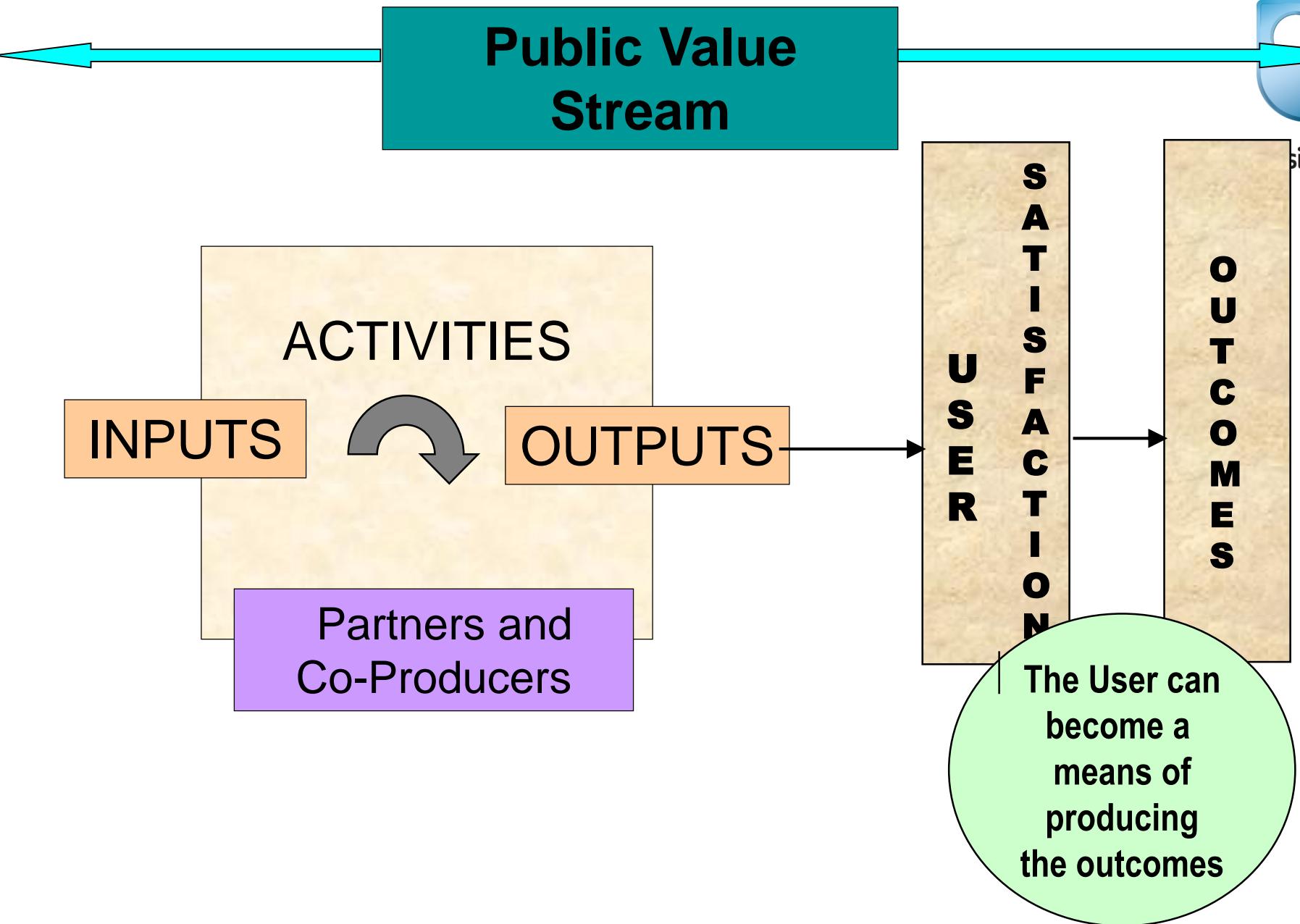
Assessing and reassessing whether public value is being created from the innovation

Benington (2011)

Public value as a contested democratic practice:

- What the public value
- What adds value to the public sphere.

The public value stream (chain) asks where is value added, lost, destroyed or wasted?



Exnovation as “decluttering” and updating

- Those archeological layers can make innovation difficult
- Moran (2003) The British state suffers from hyper-innovation – too much to focus on or sustain
- Heyen et al (2017) –exnovation as deliberate termination of an innovation – i.e. phase-out (for economic, ecological, ideological or other reasons)
- May involve conflict (e.g. campaigning for banning of CFCs) and/or period of transition (coal-based industries; diesel cars).
- Phasing out of coal plants in Germany enabled greater resources for green power industries (Heyen et al, 2017)
- Kimberly and Evanisko (1981) – *“the adoption of one innovation may be made possible by another's exnovation”*

Useful learning from private sector
but need also to recognise distinctive aspects
of public services



Private compared with public innovation (Hartley, 2013)

- Lot to learn across sectors
- Variation within as well as across sectors

BUT

1. Pressures for innovation not primarily competition but changing needs in society (though context changing e.g. foundation hospitals and schools)
2. Public organizations and networks not the private firm as the primary unit of Diffusion of innovation critical for public service organizations, and based in relatively open networks not closed alliances
3. Role of politicians and policy advisors in catalysing innovation – need to deal with more than one source of innovation and different processes of innovation
4. Role of citizens and democratic debate in assessing value of innovation
5. Accountability and transparency while an innovation being developed
6. Innovation may be contested as well as innovation
7. The “public value” test of innovation’s role in improvement

Conclusions

- Innovations are not necessarily successful and may not lead to improvement
- Improvement doesn't always need innovation
- Continual question: What public value is being created
- We should spend more time thinking about exnovation – it is not necessarily a failure
- Innovation benefits from exnovation; exnovation benefits from innovation
- *“the overwhelming emphasis of the innovation literature on adoption [instead of exnovation] is more a reflection of a pro-innovation bias than of a thoughtful consideration of managerial and organizational needs”* (Kimberly, 1981)
- Innovation needs to be complemented by an interest in exnovation

Further information and papers:

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