# The co-production critical mix: the relationship between the small enterprise and business support

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## Introduction

This paper sets out to identify how value is added for small enterprises engaging in business support and how this effects strategy development, using theories of co-production in the relationship between the business advisor and the small enterprise owner/manager and, more specifically, in the application of the critical mix (Brudney and England 1983).

Penrose (1959) identified that one of the central challenges for small enterprises is limited access to resources that disadvantages them in the market when compared to long-established, larger corporations. The Resource-Based View (Barney 1996) and later the Knowledge-Based View (Eisenhardt and Santos 2002) of firms highlighted the importance of intangible knowledge assets for the competitiveness of firms. Given the limited resources of a small enterprise, their access to and acquisition of external sources of knowledge has been a long-standing problem for both small businesses and policymakers interested in supporting small enterprises. In the United Kingdom, policymakers, between 1992 and 2011, attempted to address this problem, through market intervention, by setting up a network of small business advisers (Business Link) to help start-ups and SMEs gain better access to management knowledge, innovations, and new technologies.

The research was undertaken in the context of the Dorset sub-region in the south west of England. This study aims to investigate the role of co-production in business support for small enterprises with a focus on the relationship between the owner/manager and business support intermediaries, and is underpinned by the theories of co-production achieved through a two-way working relationship where value is added through co-operative working (Parks et al. 1981 and Rice 2002). Furthermore, the study was undertaken against a backdrop of significant change to business support provision, which occurred both locally and nationally since 2011.

Mazzarol et al. (2009) differentiated owner/managers from entrepreneurs. The owner/manager tends to be someone who launches or acquires the small enterprise for personal goals and as their main source of income, and is generally inseparable from the business.

Co-Production refers to situations in which collaboration takes place between producers and consumers to create value (Parks et al. 1981; Humphreys and Grayson 2008). In business support, this involves collaborative working between ‘consumer producers’ and ‘regular producers’ i.e. owner/managers and the business advisors (Kiser & Percy 1980; Rice 2002) where value is added that increases the effectiveness of the collaboration (Lusch et al. 2007).

The degree to which the efforts of the regular producer (the business advisor) and the consumer producer (the owner/manager) overlap has been described as the ‘critical mix’ (Brudney and England 1983) and relates to added value. In business support, the critical mix would typically include a range of factors, arising from both parties, that are positive, voluntary and active, including: rapport/trust; aspirations; timescales; relevant knowledge; commitment; and achievable goals.

Bisk (2002) considered that business advisors, mentors, coaches and counsellors all perform a similar function. However, a single term was required that would encompass the roles of a range of providers of support, advice and guidance to small enterprises. Major and Cordey-Hayes (2000, p.591) adopted the term ‘intermediary’ to describe the above as: *“any organisation standing in an agency role between the originator and the receiver of some knowledge or information.”*

To represent the profile of Dorset enterprises, in which 98% have fewer than 50 employees (Dorset County Council 2017) empirical research for the study was restricted to companies in the ‘small’ and ‘micro’ categories, referred to as *small enterprises* throughout this paper.

The recent changes to the Dorset business environment reflects the situation for the rest of England following the change of government in 2010 which resulted in the 2011/2012 closures of both the Business Link network and England’s Regional Development agencies. These funding organisations were ‘replaced’ by the new Local Economic Partnerships and Growth Hubs albeit with a significantly reduced budget and scope.

## Literature

Co-production, which is at the core of the present study, can be confused with co-creation as both refer to situations in which collaboration takes place between producers and consumers to create value (Humphreys and Grayson 2008). Lusch and Vargo (2006) described the difference between the terms, beginning with co-production, which refers to *"participation in the creation of the core offering itself …. through shared inventiveness, co-design, or shared production"*. In co-creation, which has a research background in marketing and services (Grönroos 2008), *"value can only be created with, and determined by, the user in the consumption process, or through use" (*Lusch and Vargo 2006).

In a review of both co-production and co-creation literature by Voorberg et al. (2014), two trends were identified: 1. End-users (i.e. customers) were defined as possible co-producers in the production chain; 2. End-users, with experience of products and services, become co-creators that can add value to a company. However, a potential limitation within the extant literature was that the majority of empirical data arose from public services, and the authors called for co-production research in other domains.

Kiser & Percy (1980) discussed theories around the 'regular producer' and the 'consumer producer'. In the case of business support, the advisor would act as the regular producer ie. producing 'paid for' services, whilst the owner-manager consumes the services through benefits in terms of strategy formation and the positive effect on longer term performance. Co-production therefore involves participation of both regular and consumer producers and overlaps between the two elements. Brudney and England (1983) showed the relationship between the regular producers and consumer producers through a Venn diagram (Figure 1) as a 'co-production model of service delivery', in which the 'critical mix' was considered as the level to which the two spheres overlap.

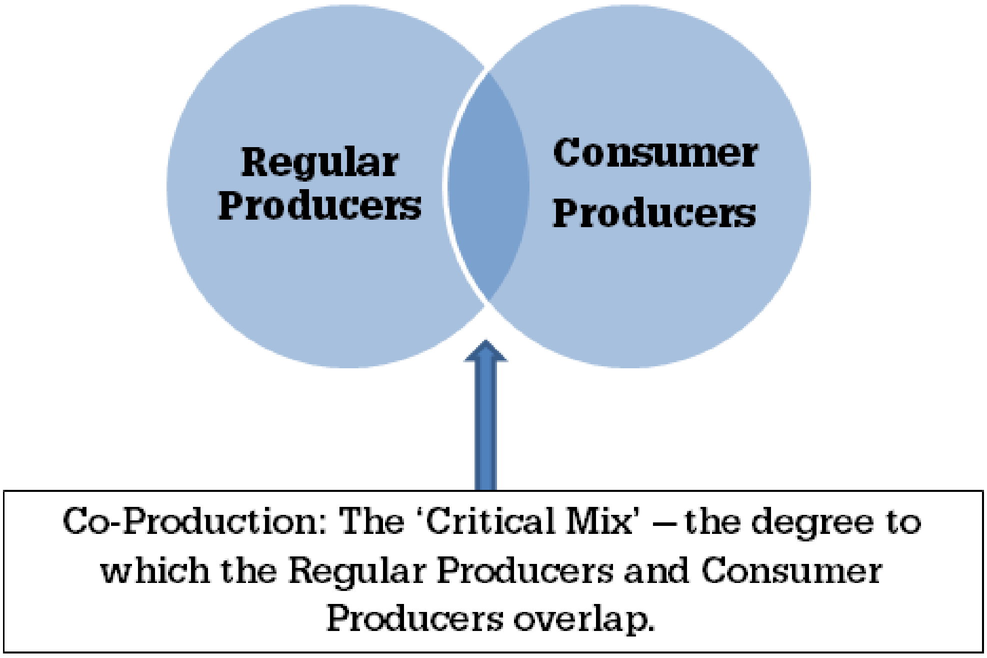


**Figure 1 – Co-Production: The Critical Mix**
(Adapted from: Brudney and England 1983)

Ahmad and Ingle (2011) noted similarities in co-production in business incubation with other social processes, and highlighted the importance of human relationships, along with compatible relationships. The authors suggested that the co-production relationship involved *"micro-processes, each with its own norms, dynamics and stages"* (Ahmad and Ingle 2011, p.626). Ahmad and Ingle also stated the further importance of the voluntary and active participation of the clients, and how the level of interaction could have an impact on the overall experience, which supported previous 'critical mix' research from Brudney and England (1983). Finally, the authors stated the importance of networking, i.e. industrial links and brokerage, and its contribution to overall quality.

Parks et al. (1981) identified three main factors that influenced co-production, namely: technology; economics; and institutional constraint. Technology creates physical limits, so co-production must be technically feasible; economic factors limit the relative costs of the regular and consumer inputs, compared to the value of outputs; and institutional constraints related to services offered by the producer.

Whitaker (1980) considered three dimensions of co-production: requesting assistance; co-operation; and mutual adjustment. For example, the owner/manager may request support directly or the services of the advisor may be offered, and there may be mutual benefit in the relationship.

Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2011) considered value co-creation in knowledge intensive services, and identified five key activities which related to business support/advice, namely:

**Diagnosing** needs; **Designing** and producing the solution; **Organising** the process and resources; **Managing** value conflicts; and **Implementing** the solution. The authors went on to discuss the involvement of networks, and the impact on value creation, and highlighted a potential need for future research on the value that could be added by involving network actors in 'multi-actor' problem solving.

Considering value creation in co-production, there is an emerging view that value creation may not be related directly to goods and services, but that the consumer as co-producer, always contributes to the creation of value. Gronroos (2008) found value arose through consumption, rather than value distribution and stated the importance of focussing on value creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) also acknowledged pro-active customer involvement in the process of value creation.

Vargo and Lusch (2004) studied value creation arising through co-creation and co-production, and suggested there had been a shift from the traditional viewpoint, where value was assessed around *operand* resources, to *operant* resources as a driver of value. Constantin and Lusch (1994) defined operand resources as those needing an operation, or act, to produce an effect (i.e. value). Conversely, operant resources were defined as those that produce effects.

This work from Vargo and Lusch (2004) resulted in a move from a 'goods centred' dominant logic, where the consumer is an operand resource, to a 'service centred' dominant logic, where the consumer is primarily an operant resource i.e. value is added through use, rather than from the product/service itself. However, Lusch et al. (2007) suggested that the beneficiary is responsible for the determination of value - value is not necessarily added at the end of the process, but can also arise through the ongoing relationship with the beneficiary.

This service centred view represented a move towards *intangibles*, which includes skills, information and knowledge, and where value is perceived by the consumer through 'value in use' (Vargo and Lusch 2004). In Service Dominant Logic, value is added through:

- Multiple actors, that would always include the beneficiary (the owner/manager);
- Participation in developing value propositions i.e. actors cannot deliver value itself;
- Perception of the beneficiary i.e. value is determined by the owner/manager; and
- Co-ordinated value co-creation.

Vargo and Lusch (2004) discussed the value-creation aspects through consumption, and this can be applied to business support where the on-going activities, arising from business support / strategy formation, continue to add value after the intervention concludes. The authors argued that the enterprise could only make value propositions, but it was the consumer producer (owner/manager) that determined value and created it through co-production. Lusch et al. (2007)

suggested that, in co-production, value could also be added through the ongoing relationship and was linked to the perceptions of the beneficiary. In cases such as business support, this suggested that value was added through both the co-production interventions themselves AND at the point of use, when new strategies were deployed.

Moreover, Davis and Manrodt (1996) considered a service centred view which fitted well with the concept of value creation in co-production business support interventions, in which the co-production process involves defining a specific need and developing solutions, involving:

- An interactive definition of the consumer's problem
- Development of a customised solution – including intangible services (e.g. business support)
- Delivery of that solution to the consumer

Rice (2002) applied co-production theory to business support, in the context of business incubation in which *"the two parties engage in co-production to compensate for the firm's gaps in knowledge, competencies and resources"*. Rice referred to three approaches to counselling: ***"reactive and episodic"*** - which was usually received through business assistance programmes and was initiated by the owner-manager; ***"pro-active and episodic"*** – in the context of a business incubator setting, whereby the advisor could be reached fairly informally, yet this could equally apply to regular visits; and ***"continual and pro-active"*** - involving an on-going focus on strategic needs.

The services offered by an intermediary offering general business support would tend towards either the *"reactive and episodic"* or, for those where regular visits occurred, then also towards being *"continual and pro-active"*.

Rice's (2002) work on co-production also alluded to the idea of a change of culture towards longer term thinking. This involved achieving autonomy, sustainability and economic security following the conclusion of a co-production relationship, having developed new competencies, increased knowledge and additional resources.

In their work on relationships between accountants (acting as advisors, mentors, coaches) and their clients, Blackburn and Jarvis (2010) highlighted the need for ongoing relationships with owner/managers. Deakins et al. (2001) found this role required flexibility and understanding around the small enterprise and its cultural environment, and suggested a need for suitable interpersonal skills, participation in referral networks and client empathy. Blackburn and Jarvis (2010) found such relationships, along with links to professional bodies, could result in a 'catalyst for change' in small enterprise development.

Eriksson et al. (2014) considered co-creation in business incubation, including and the clients' customers and technology researchers. The authors noted an important goal was the generation of trust, and how such trust was a prerequisite for collaboration and dialogue. For success, there was a need for parties to be active, motivated, and to immerse themselves in the process, which included intense and regular interactions. However, despite the approach being primarily based around co-creation, Eriksson et al. confirmed that the co-production approach of Rice (2002) still ‘resonated well’ with their own research.

Trust was an important factor within the co-production literature (Vanleene et al. 2015). Wang and Wan Wart (2007) defined trust in co-production as: *“trust is the people’s belief that their interests are being treated fairly and that the other party is reliable to carry out its role”.* Wang and Van Wart went on to suggest that trust arose through ethical behaviours, such as honesty and integrity, and on-going co-production interactions that created perceived performance improvement. Vanleene et al. (2015) suggested that a further factor in the creation of trust was the achievement of the original goals of the relationship. Lewis and Weigert (1985) focussed on two distinct conceptualisations of trust:

1. **Cognition based trust**: a degree of cognitive familiarity with the object of trust i.e. a knowledge of the other party, and belief in their abilities; and
2. **Affect based trust**: from social and psychological bonds between the parties i.e. the emotional bond between partners in the relationship.

However, perceptions of trust are subjective. When used to assess the impact of interactions, especially in new relationships, and discussions around trust, rapport, confidence etc. may be influencing managers’ early expectations/meanings and influencing actions (Devins and Gold 2000).

To summarise, much of the literature relating to co-production has focussed on the public sector (Brudney & England 1983; Kiser & Percy 1980; Parks et al. 1981; Voorberg et al. 2014). Whilst there is limited co-production literature relating specifically to business support, many of the concepts and theories introduced in the extant literature can, and has been, adapted to the context of business support, principally through the work of Rice (2002).

## Methodology

Having considered the original aims and objectives and the extant literature, the following research question was developed:

> *How is value added to the strategy formation process through co-production in the relationship between the business advisor and the small enterprise owner/manager?*

The research was predominantly based on qualitative data arising from interviews with small enterprise owner/managers and business support intermediaries. A range of additional sources were used to provide context to the analysis. Greene (2012) described such an approach as ‘Mixed Methods Lite’ which typically involved a dominant method, reinforced with a secondary method. Therefore, for the triangulation of findings, the dominant qualitiative method was supplemented with information from sources incuding: secondary quantitative reports, reports and documentation provided by the interviewees; organisational websites; and financial data.

The research approach included:

- **Primary Qualitative Data:** A series of semi-structured interviews – with small enterprises and business support intermediaries, examining experiences and perceptions around co-production, business support and strategy. Usually including site visits.

- **Secondary Data**: e.g. UK Small Business Survey, industry reports, government documents, company documentation to back-up and triangulate findings.

- **Development of in-depth profiles**: for small enterprises and intermediaries – using a combination of primary and secondary data. The profiles provided significantly deeper context to the interview data and informed the analysis.

The qualitative research involved a series of twelve face-to-face interviews, which were undertaken, during Summer 2016, with six owner/managers and six business support intermediaries. The interviewees were reached through recommendations, existing networks and a direct ‘e-shot’. The interviews were semi-structured, lasted up to two hours, and were recorded and fully transcribed, for later coding and analysis.

The interviewees were chosen using the established purposeful sampling approach to identify and select non-random, ‘information-rich’ respondents, thus making effective use of limited resources (Patton 2002). A ‘qualification process’ took place, in which potential participants were informally assessed for their suitability to engage with the research at a suitable level. For example, there was little point in working long-term with small enterprises that had not actively engaged in business support. Subsequently, this core group involved small enterprises which already received ongoing business support. In order to provide a balance of viewpoints, and to gain access to a wide portfolio of business support experience, a further six business support intermediaries were interviewed. Participants were selected across sectors, geographic locations and a range of business support agencies, each of whom would have supported numerous small enterprises.

Furthermore the ‘mixed methods lite’ approach allowed the premise of triangulation of a range of different methods, which had the benefit of limiting any inherent biases arising from purposeful sampling (Greene et al. 1989).

The final set of small enterprises was selected, based on a mix of the following factors:

- Had received regular business support with sufficient involvement to provide ‘information rich’ responses (Patton 2002)
- Good geographical spread across Dorset
- Small enterprises, with fewer than 50 employees
- Had made use of different modes of business support
- Evidence of innovative practices
- Coverage across a varied range of industry sectors
- Operating at different points of the business life cycle

The intermediary group was selected on the basis of the following factors:

- Representing involvement across the main providers of direct business support in Dorset – Personal business advisors; growth programmes; mentoring; education; business coaching; private consultancy; banking; networking.
- Involvement at various levels in business support programmes
- Good geographical coverage
- Wide range of experience and an expectation of ‘information rich’ responses.
- Recommendations from other participants (snowballing).

The interviews was based on a semi-structured outline that covered a range of issues including: underlying company information; approaches to strategic planning; experience of business support; issues around co-production; and their views on the availability of business support.

Framework Analysis, which was chosen for data analysis, is not a mathematical process but still uses a systematic approach to the data collection and analysis, which is based around a ‘focus of enquiry’. Framework Analysis is particularly suited to research where set questions are defined along with pre-defined samples, and a set timescale. Data is organised according to key issues and themes using five steps (Ritchie & Spencer 1994):

1. Familiarisation;

2. Identifying a thematic framework;
3. Indexing;
4. Charting; and
5. Mapping and interpretation.

The researcher works with transcripts of the data, such as interviews, focus groups, documents, notes, and immerses themselves in the data to gain and understanding of the material (Ritchie & Spencer 1994). The researcher gains an awareness of ideas and common themes which are subsequently coded and analysed using a systematic approach. The method of framework analysis allows flexibility throughout the stages of analysis. This means that either full data collection could be undertaken prior to analysis; or the analysis can begin while the data collection process is on-going.

A semi-structured format, with open-ended questions, allows participants to spontaneously share perceptions, opinions and experiences. When analysing such data, the responses are grouped into categories of meaning, rather than into pre-defined categories. Inductive reasoning is used to identify relationships between the categories that arise through the data. These perspectives can be analysed in a model that helps explain the processes and coding through an abstract theoretical framework, demonstrating an understanding of the data and leading to suitable conclusions (Bazeley 2009).

As incidents are identified, considered and arranged into categories, the categories themselves, and relationships between them, develop and are refined throughout the analysis process. Categories may therefore be subject to content and definition changes. The researcher codes and analyses data simultaneously thus developing concepts, which will be refined as incidents, and their properties and relationships, are compared and explored - integrating them into a *“coherent explanatory model”* (Taylor and Bogdan 1984, p.126).

Having followed the analytical process of Framework Analysis (Ritchie & Spencer 1994), the final stage involves *‘Mapping and Interpretation’*. Data reduction techniques were used to consolidate frameworks of codes, into themes and concepts, under each category arising within co-production. Figure 2, below, provides an example of how the initial quotations were organised into concepts, themes and categories. The quotations and concepts were grouped according to the two sets of interviewees.

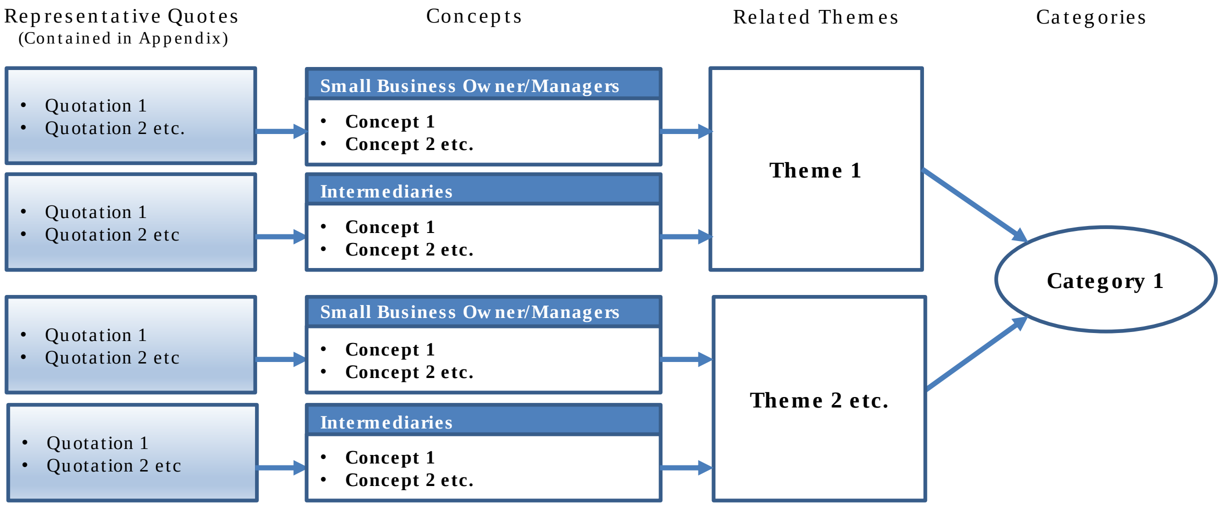


**Figure 2 – Data Structure Template**

In total, six key categories were identified, under the heading of co-production, and each was analysed in detail. Figure 3, below, provides an overview of the six key categories, and the themes arising within them. The categories are independent and have not been considered, or displayed, in any particular order.

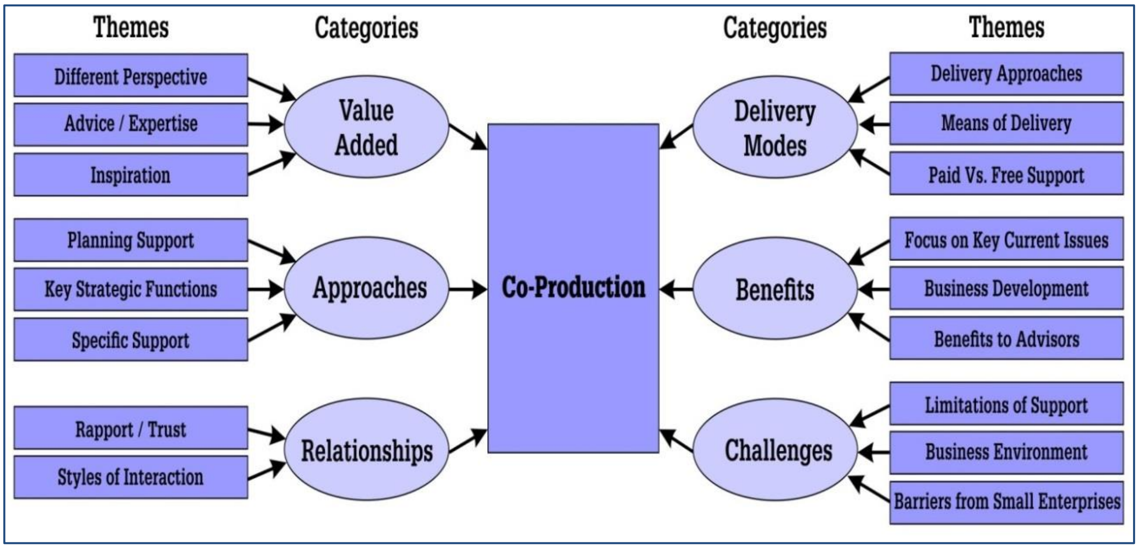


**Figure 3 - Overview of the Co-Production Categories and Themes Identified**

Figure 4 demonstrates how the data structure was broken down into separate the categories, for individual analysis. The 'Challenges' category, which is shown as one of six categories in Figure 3, has been used to illustrate how the original quotations were grouped into broad concepts, which were subsequently organised into themes and resulted in the identification of the main categories for analysis.

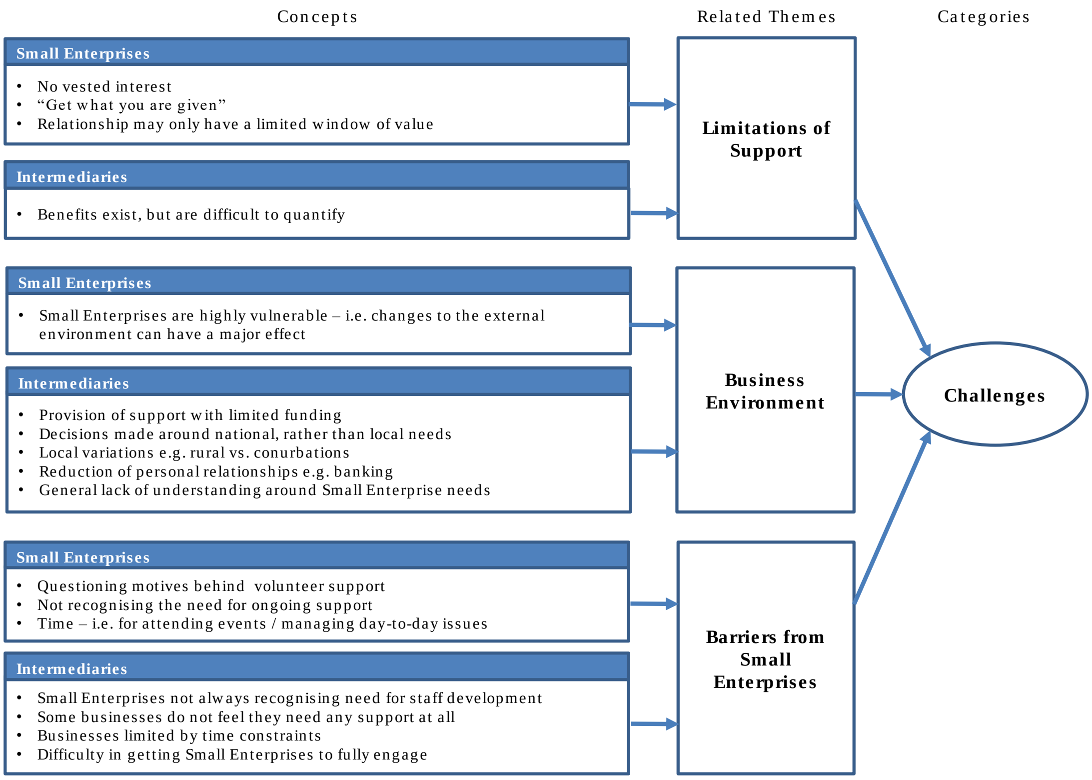


**Figure 4 – Example Data Structure for the 'Challenges' Category**

## Analysis

In co-production theory, value is added when the 'output', arising from interactions between the owner/manager and the intermediary/business advisor, result in benefits to the company - in terms of strategic direction and impact. According to Kiser & Percy (1980), the 'consumer' of co-production services [the owner/manager] works with the 'producer' [the intermediary/business advisor] and the co-production 'output' potentially results in added value.

Such outputs, in the context of adding value were further explored by Dewson et al. (2000), who provided guidance on measuring 'hard outcomes', 'soft outcomes' and 'distance travelled' in work carried out for The Institute for Employment Studies. The authors suggested that one of the key reasons for collecting such information is to *"assess the added value of the project at an aggregate level".*

- The **hard outcomes** are tangible, clearly definable and quantifiable results which show progress made.

- The **soft outcomes** represent the intermediate stages on the way to achieving the hard outcomes and relate to wider "behavioural" changes that could include improved skills in finance, business planning, management etc.
- The term **distance travelled** relates to progress made through interactions, such as business support, towards hard outcomes such as employability, and relates directly to added value.

According to Dewson et al. (2000), achieving certain soft outcomes could sometimes appear insignificant, but can actually result in significant leaps forward in terms of achieving the outcomes that add value. This research study has tended to focus on these 'soft outcomes' and on the perceptions of the small enterprises and intermediaries, so, whilst added value is not measured in terms of 'hard outcomes', there is a strong case that, using a systematic approach to data analysis of the soft outcomes, that indicators of added value arising through co-production, can be identified.

### Category 1: Value Added

The interviewees were asked to provide specific examples of value being added through co-production. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis:

Firstly, issues were seen from a **different perspective.** Through the interactions, issues were often seen and considered in a different, and objective, way than the owner/manager did when working alone – providing the potential for new ways of thinking. One interviewee described this, appropriately, as '"the eyes of the tourist". Leach & Bogod (1999, p.146) discussed the benefits of external support, provided by mentors, that brought in a 'new dimension of experience and forthright objectivity' that may be rare in a small enterprises, and that provided an objective, effective sounding board for addressing business issues.

> *"I'm a big believer in what I call the 'eyes of the tourists' …. the idea is that, when I go on holiday for two or three weeks and come back to the business, I see it in a completely different light …. the mentor has definitely got the 'eyes of the tourist' when he sits with us." -* **Software Company**

Secondly, there were benefits from the provision of **advice and expertise**. The owner/managers had strong experience in their own area, but could still benefit from more specialised and focussed expertise from experienced intermediaries. Previous work from Rice (2002), which focussed on co-production in the field of business support / incubation, indicated that entrepreneurs perceived that the superior knowledge and experience of their mentors created the potential for value to be added through co-production. One example, arising in the empirical data, was from a steel fixings company that had been run by a managing director, who was a former engineer with limited managerial experience. The advisor helped ‘educate’ the MD by shifting the focus from pure engineering to finance and managing people.

> *“He laid it on the line to me - blow everything else: money, money, money. You’ve got to be making it otherwise there's no point in talking about anything else, because the company won't exist.”* - **Steel Fixings Company**

In work around value creation, Walters et al. (2002) suggested that, in any business, the building blocks of knowledge, effective management of business relationships and technology form the foundations for growth. Advice therefore appears to support growth in small enterprises (Robson and Bennett 2000).

Thirdly, value was added through **Inspiration** – the involvement of the intermediary could help to stimulate business development, through focussing on business planning and strategy formation. Owner/managers appeared to ‘step-up’ and work on planning/strategy matters, that they otherwise may have been putting off. The data indicated that the co-production relationships, which sometimes lasted several years, may have influenced company culture, in terms of planning and strategy formation.

St-Jean and Audet (2009) argued that support, in this case from mentoring, was helpful in facilitating the transfer of knowledge from the business world, and for developing a set of competences could be adopted by the owner/manager. This included an improved vision for the business and the pursuit of new business opportunities. Furthermore, a key finding was around the development of the individual in terms of skills, learning and self-confidence. There were several cases where owner/managers appeared to be developing new behaviours that arose from the co-production interactions.

> *“Having an audience sort of makes you raise your performance level …. we’ve raised our game because we have to sit with the mentor and it would be embarrassing not to have delivered.”* – **Web Company**

Respect, towards the intermediaries, appeared to be an important factor in inspiring owner/managers. All of the intermediaries in this study had strong knowledge and experience, and it appeared that the owner/managers recognised and appreciated this, which was reflected in their perceptions of success across three clear categories:

1. Respect around the levels of **knowledge and experience** gathered over many years;

2. an appreciation that, particularly in the case of the business mentors, time, knowledge and expertise was available free of charge i.e. **‘giving something back’**; and

3. through having the confidence that the intermediary had been **accredited/trained** to an appropriate level.

### Category 2: Approaches

There were generally three approaches to the development of plans: 1. Providing **general guidance,** so the owner/manager could develop a formal plan for review; 2. **Critique** for an existing business plan; and 3. Less formal **action point** plans. Rice (2002) found business planning and strategy to be the most frequent type of co-production assistance in joint counselling, and a similar pattern was observed in the present study.

Firstly, the theme of **planning support** arose where small enterprises needed support and guidance with the development of their business plans. The intermediaries found general guidance was the most appropriate approach. The intermediaries would set goals and challenges but the owner/managers would develop content around planning templates. This semi-structured approach was of particular importance as small enterprises, usually with independent ownership, tended to have a fairly unstructured approach to planning (O’Regan and Ghobadian 2002).

> *“I would always want them to come up with any formal plan. So I will give them support and help and ideas and challenges but anything formal, I would want to come from them.”* **– Business Coach**

An alternative to formal business plans was the action plan, which tended to be used by Business Link and the Growth Hubs. The development of action plans involved the owner/manager and intermediary working together to move from a ‘present situation’ towards an agreed vision, and to develop an action plan, with milestones and allocated resources, in order to achieve this vision (Devins and Gold 2000). Action plans support the ‘performance management process’ via strategy development, through developing vision/mission/values and through the achievement of key business goals and objectives (Ates et al. 2013). Such plans, developed by intermediaries in the present study, involved regular reviews, and data gathering from joint interactions.

> *“So the actual diagnostic again was fairly informal but the output, in terms of a plan, was a one page action plan.”* ***– Business Advisor***

Secondly, the theme of **key strategic functions** arose around the need for owner/managers to be equipped with the type of business skills they may have lacked,  to develop their business. Small enterprises in the UK often have specialist experience, but can lack expertise in key strategic functions (Storey 1994). Storey referred to the 1988 'Enterprise Initiative', the purpose of which was to improve competitiveness through subsidised consultancy in six key strategic functions – these included *marketing; product and service quality; manufacturing and service systems; design; business planning;* and *financial and management information systems*. This initiative arguably paved the way for later business support programmes.

Examples of general business support, arising in the empirical data, included dealing with inexperienced teams; lack of understanding around basic business foundations; shifting focus from specialist/technical issues; and prioritisation of business needs. The intermediaries all demonstrated a wide range of generic business skills and all had supported numerous businesses of different sizes, sectors and locations which, in most cases, did not directly relate to the industry sector of the enterprises receiving support.

> *"You have to have your foundations first in order to then be steady to move forward in your business."* ***– Business Coach***

> *"All our mentors have a set of general business skills …. we have a very wide range of business skills available to us."* ***– Mentoring Organisation***

Thirdly, a need for **specific support** was identified. This focusses on the more specialised needs of the small enterprise including technical needs, exploring new offerings, industry advice etc. and often involved external 'signposting'.

Specific support tended to be driven, either by the needs of the enterprise, or 'pushed' by the intermediaries, often as a result of external funding that was intended for certain specialist activities and/or innovation e.g. SMART Awards, Innovation Vouchers.  The specialist activities, being 'pushed' were often a result of funding availability which varied over time and location. For example - at the time of writing, funding was available in Dorset for cyber security; access to finance; digital capability; and through the Local Manufacturing Advisory Programme (LMAP), all of which meant specific support was promoted that may not necessarily meet the immediate needs of local small enterprises. Priest (1998) suggested that business support initiatives were often narrowly defined and driven more from suppliers than customers.

Furthermore, support offerings were also 'pushed' was through local events facilitated by business support agencies, which had mixed reactions from the small enterprises interviewed, where the benefits of attendance were not always clear. The perceived benefits of such events appeared to be stronger in the intermediary group, than for the small enterprises themselves.

> *"We've been to various breakfast network gatherings but really don't find them particularly helpful at all …. None of them have shown us actually any type of roads into potential opportunities, or really any sort of business support."* **– Cabinet Makers**

Examples where the enterprise had their own specific needs included specialist 'domain expertise' in software development/online marketing strategy; engineering/technical expertise; rebranding; dealing with specific cash-flow issues; planning for succession / buy-out; and support in getting new products/services to market.

> *"And certainly the support that we're now seeking of domain experts with CE level experience, who are going to help us grow our price comparison website business."* **– Software Company**

### Category 3: Relationships

The nature of the relationship between the intermediary and the owner/manager can form the basis of the entire co-production process from the outset (Adamson 2000). Two main themes emerged from the data analysis:

Firstly, relationships were clearly built on **rapport and trust** and perceptions of the importance of this theme was evident in the majority of interviews undertaken with both intermediaries and small enterprises. It has been recognised that consideration of the business support intermediary as a 'trusted partner', who acts as a 'confidante' to the owner/manager, is an important dimension in successful personal relationships (Blackburn et al. 2010). In most cases there was an implied level of *cognitive trust*, as owner/managers (in most cases) tended to have confidence in the abilities and expertise of their intermediaries, which was largely arising through established relationships and/or confidence in the business support provider they represented. The analysis therefore focused more on *affect based trust* i.e. the emotional bond between the intermediary and the owner/manager (Lewis and Weigert 1985).

On the whole, the relationships tended to operate around semi-formal interactions, characterised by regular meetings on premises, action plans and reports/memos. Such relationships, whilst still involving trust, rapport and mutual respect, were usually maintained at a semi-formal level, where a 'professional distance' tended to exist between the parties.

> *"He's a bit guarded and he's got a lot of experience and he seems to have done a lot of mentoring. He doesn't like to get too close to his mentees."* **- Web Company**

> *"You've got to get a rapport. It's got to be that you can get along - and you can really have that open, but challenging, relationship, on occasions, if you're really going to make a difference."* **- Consultant / Business Advisor**

In some cases, the relationships were a little closer and had perhaps developed into a 'professional friendship', having been established over many years. However, despite cases of familiarity, co-production interactions were still usually conducted in a formal or semi-formal professional manner. Hansford et al. (2002) found that owner/managers often raised the importance of social factors, such as friendship, as providing benefits - however, this view was not always shared by intermediaries, who rarely reported friendship as adding benefits.

However, there were also cases presented when the trust was missing, and the relationships had subsequently ended, or at least did not go well. Hansford et al. (2002) found that one of the most commonly raised problems in mentoring relationships, was lack of trust which, on the part of mentees, had resulted in poor co-operation. The data for the present study suggested there were sometimes trust issues arising from some owner/managers' perceptions of 'hidden agendas' on the part of the previous intermediaries.

> *"My coach was very much just in it for him and the money – and took advantage of the scheme, because all my funding went on him. He gave me an intense coaching scheme, but I couldn't keep up with what he was trying to do. So we burnt through my funding in about six months."* **– Web Company**

Secondly, the co-production relationships were influenced by a range of factors from both parties resulting in **styles of interaction** that were often unique to each case.

Business support intermediaries often bring in their own individual experiences and preferred ways of working with managers (Devins and Gold 2000). Whilst the overall pattern of delivery, presented in the data, could best be described as semi-formal, there were considerable differences in general format of interactions, including board meeting style formats with formal documents; semi-structured meetings led by the intermediary; and very open and informal meetings, albeit held in company offices.

> *"We sort of treat it like a board meeting …. we submit papers maybe a week before, which includes a CEO report, a full set of management accounts up to the previous month and anything else we've agreed and has been agendaised."* **– Software Company**

*"No, it's quite informal. We don't have an agenda."* **– Cabinet Makers**

Support programmes such, as the Business Link brokerage model, Growth Hubs, and the mentoring schemes were designed to work on the basis of the intermediary acting as a 'sounding board', rather than as providers of direct advice (Hjalmarsson and Johansson 2003).

On the whole, the co-production relationships usually started off with an initial 'fact finding' session and, as relationships developed, then a deeper understanding of the business, and its issues, would result. These initial sessions could range from a very structured evaluation, as used in the Business Link brokerage model, to more informal evaluations of need, such as general discussions and getting to know the owner/manager and the team.

*"The mentor listens and gets us speaking. And then we then formulate ideas and options."* **– Cabinet Makers**

*"You can be too rigid, too inflexible and if you're not careful you spend too much time having a meeting and not enough time coming up with really great ideas."* **– Shutter Company**

The specific style of delivery varied considerably, which included matters around documentation and the overall format of meetings. There were many factors demonstrated that influenced delivery styles these included: the level of the relationship; guidelines from the intermediaries' host organisation; personal styles/preferences/agendas; the overall aims of the process; and the narrower aims of specific interactions (for example: a meeting to raise finance vs. a brainstorming session)

### Category 4: Delivery Modes

Support was delivered practically, using a number of different 'modes' which were largely dependent on the requirements of the small enterprise; the issues being addressed; the chosen approach of the intermediary; and the attributes of the intermediary's host organisation and/or the funding source.Three main themes emerged from the data analysis:

Firstly, the delivery modes varied according to need. The **focus of support** theme therefore took into account whether support was for short-term issues, or for longer term strategy formation. As previously mentioned, co-production relationships for business support tend to be either **"reactive and episodic"** or, for those where visits are regular and ongoing, then this can be described as **"continual and pro-active"** (Rice, 2002). Within these modes of delivery the practical approaches to delivery varied considerably.

Devins and Gold (2000) identified three differing approaches for practical business support delivery, which were aligned with the findings of the present study.

- **Delivery Approach 1:** Looking towards a vision for two or more years ahead, a semi-structured process, involving the mentor and management team in the development of a plan to achieve this.

  *"I will give them some advice and guidance, go away and compile a report or compile a plan that I would suggest would be able to support them."*
  **– Consultant/Business Advisor**

- **Delivery Approach 2:** Tackling issues of current concern, through a problem solving process that identifies and tackles key issues identified with the management team

  *"I wanted somebody to come in periodically to look over my shoulder and just to approve or not as the case may be."* **– Steel Fixings**

- **Delivery Approach 3:** Acting as a 'sounding board', which is a generally unstructured process dealing with issues of concern for the owner/manager.

  *"That's been a constant over the last five years. Once every sort of six weeks and it's just being able to brain dump what's been going on in our business."* **– Cabinet Makers**

Secondly, issues relating specifically to the logistics of meetings were considered under the theme of **means of delivery**. Virtually all of the meetings took place on company premises, and tended to last for anything between 1-3 hours, which was dependant on the delivery on modes and the stage of maturity in the relationship.. There were some examples where established working relationships resulted in very informal meetings, particularly when creative outcomes were sought. According to Devins and Gold (2000) it could take between three to six months for the relationship to become established to a point where they were 'accepted' by the owner/manager and in a position to fully pursue their joint activities.

> *"It's usually an hour or two hours …. Once every six weeks."* **– Cabinet Makers**

For the 'continual and pro-active' relationships, the delivery pattern was usually monthly. The 'reactive and episodic' interactions tended to be either ad-hoc (as and when required by the small enterprise); one-off - leading to a set of actions (through the growth organisation); or spanning periods of a year or more (in the case of reviews that were carried out by Business Link).

> *"The average one would be monthly. The weekly ones would be done probably by phone."* **– Business Network**

Thirdly, the practical issues arising from **paid vs. unpaid support** were considered. The intermediaries involved in the interviews had worked for a range of support organisations offering a mix of paid for and funded support. Paid services included early Business Link interactions, a private business support network; a consultant. The 'free' services included later Business Link offerings (up to 2012), the growth organisation and the local mentoring programme.

There were some issues with affordability that were raised by intermediaries. Certain intermediaries suggested that some companies could not afford regular support, but noted that they had sometimes tailored their offerings to meet needs.

> *"It's what's right for the company because many of them can't afford too much."* **– Business Network**

> *"I would normally work with an individual and businesses to plan a cost effective delivery strategy for them."* **– Business Coach**

There were no significant differences noted in the *quality* of delivery, but funding did affect the duration of the overall interventions. In the case of the growth organisation in particular, limitations of funding were clearly affecting the scope of delivery in that relationships were limited to one or two sessions, each lasting 3 or 8 hours, and resulting in an action plan and signposting to further support. In the case of the most recent Business Link offerings (up to 2012) , the removal of a £400 fee for business reviews resulted in 'lighter touch' interventions led to a one-page plan.

> *"We have had to make some cutbacks within the team but the core services that we deliver are the same."* **– Growth Organisation**

### Category 5: Benefits

The interviewees from both groups generally had positive experiences and, in many cases, felt interventions had been beneficial. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis:

Firstly the benefits for operational matters arose from a **focus on current issues**. With a focus on the delivery approach of *'tackling issues of current concern'* (Devins and Gold 2000), both the intermediaries and small enterprises appeared to report benefits in a fairly generic way.

> *"Certainly the evidence and feedback from our clients is that they do get huge benefit from working with mentors."* **– Mentoring Organisation**

The tendency was to report general perceptions, such as having a 'sounding board' or a 'problem solving process' provided benefits, but there was not always clarity about what the specific benefits actually were. However, specific benefits were reported around current issues, and these included shifting the focus back to a point for considering key matters of current concern; the usefulness of an outside perspective; and critique on management styles. Hansford et al. (2002) found the main benefits for mentees included personal satisfaction; motivation; coaching; developing new ideas; improving skills; and in setting challenges. Ramsden and Bennett (2005) also suggested that such 'soft' impacts were the most commonplace and that business advice had benefits predominantly around personal development of the owner/manager.

> *"I guess the main benefit is just having an outside perspective."* **– Web Company**

A further benefit reported by the intermediaries was in being able to point small enterprises towards the local support and services they needed, and helping them to navigate through the fairly complex 'web' of local business support network.

> *"Within five minutes, I've put them in touch with the right people."* ***– Business Advisor***

Secondly, benefits that related to **business development** were for more strategic issues and fitted with the approach of '*looking towards a vision for two+ years ahead'* - Devins and Gold (2000). The benefits were more clearly defined when considered in the context of business development and strategy formation. However, the data suggested that the benefits of strategy formation, arising from co-production, appeared to include both longer term benefits for the small enterprise; and with the development of the owner/manager as they began to develop a planning culture through working with, and learning from the intermediary (St-Jean and Audet 2009).

> *"Benefits: impartiality, knowledge of a confusing environment, providing the businesses with growth opportunities."* **– Growth Organisation**

> *"Some of the businesses change out of all recognition."*

Thirdly, apart from the benefits for the small enterprise, there were also **benefits to the advisor**, in terms of satisfication, personal development etc. Whilst the literature has tended to focus on benefits for the companies, very few publications have mentioned the benefits to the intermediaries themselves (Ragins and Scandura 1999). Considering mentoring in general terms, Mullen (1994) suggested that mentors benefit from relationships by obtaining valuable information from their mentees. Hansford et al. (2002) found that reported benefits to business mentors were mainly in the areas of collaboration; networking; sharing of ideas; satisfaction; and knowledge/skills.

Several of the intermediaries were getting personal satisfaction from working with small enterprises, both in terms of 'giving something back' and in the general 'excitement' of seeing businesses develop. Learning from the owner/managers was a further factor raised, and contributed to the overall knowledge base of the intermediary.

> *"I wanted to give something back and that was important to me."* **– Volunteer Business Mentor**

> *"It is a very enlightening and exciting thing to learn about other businesses that you may not previously have had any involvement in. So you are growing your own knowledge all the time."* **– Business Coach**

> *"It's great fun. I find it challenging on occasion, but it's also very exhilarating and exciting on occasions."* **– Consultant / Business Advisor**

### Category 6: Challenges

Whilst the previous categories have demonstrated that the small enterprises and intermediaries generally reported positive experiences, there were still challenges along the way. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis:

Firstly, as support was delivered from funded and private providers, there were **limitations to the scope of the support** given, which arose from issues such as policies, funding levels and affordability. Support was often limited due to limited funding; either on the part of the providers, or from the small enterprises. The scope (rather than quality) of support from providers could be limited by levels of public funding.  For those small enterprises paying for support, intermediaries suggested that support was limited by the amount the companies could afford. A further issue arose around the delivery policies of the providers – for example, in mentoring programmes where direct advice was not provided. Restrictions from funders also included a focus on specific sectors or particular disciplines. In the case of Business Link, for example, provision had been offered on the basis of regular visits from a Personal Business Advisor offering direct advice, but later changed to a system of annual reviews linked to action plans and brokerage.

> *"We work with what we have got.  And it is easy to say more funding but actually, the delivery is more important and the processes and the overall strategy of how you do it."* **– Growth Organisation**

Secondly, the **business environment,** in which small enterprises operate, was constantly changing, with continual changes in the wider environment that affects the providers of support. Some intermediaries raised the point that funded support may not have been suited to the exact needs of small enterprises. This came down to a lack of understanding around the needs of small enterprises generally, but was also due to low levels of national understanding of regional issues.

The intermediaries highlighted the difficulty in quantifying the effectiveness of support. Previous studies have tended towards 'soft' outcomes that assess perceptions around the outcomes of interventions, and ignore 'hard' outcomes (Bennett and Robson 2004). Even when hard quantifiable figures were provided, there was concern raised that such figures may not provide an adequate demonstration of success (Dewson et al. 2000). Despite a considerable amount of money being spent on support, evaluations of business support policies for small enterprises could be considerably underdeveloped and these were largely limited to monitoring initial take-up, and questionnaires for participants (Wren and Storey 2002).

> *"It's one of those holy grails, there is, as you'll see on our website, masses of anecdotal evidence that mentoring is the best thing since sliced bread, but actually coming up with some numbers?…."* ***– Mentoring Organisation***

Thirdly, there were **barriers arising from the small enterprises**, themselves, which could affect both take up of support and/or levels of engagement and implementation of solutions. According to Dorset LEP (2014), Dorset had a large small business economy which was locally focussed and located across the county. There were also larger businesses, often with an international focus, that were generally located in or around the conurbations. Whilst the LEP considered the local economy to be 'resilient', there were some weaknesses identified, including skills shortages in certain areas; GVA below national average; low wages; a shortage of young people; infrastructure issues; and an over-dependence on visitors to the area. Some of these issues were clearly evident in the interviews, including the skills shortage and infrastructure issues. Furthermore, rural enterprise development can be subject to significant challenges (Lyons 2000), and affects many small enterprises within the Dorset business environment.

> *"It's very difficult to get enthusiastic apprentices and it's difficult to retain those apprentices – if, and when, they start."* **– Cabinet Makers**

> *"I can't really work from home because the broadband is not fast enough."* **– Web Company**

Barriers to adoption of support, from small enterprises, were identified within four main groupings: 1) an independent approach where there was no desire for outside support; 2) not recognising the need for regular support (but still having occasional interventions); 3) not having the resources (i.e. funds, time availability) for support; and 4) when small enterprises took on support, but did not fully engage. Furthermore, Lambrecht and Pirnay (2005) identified three barriers that could prevent SMEs from engaging fully with providers of external advice, namely **Adverse selection** – where the intermediary serves their own interests; **Suitability of the approach**; and **Capability constraints** – where the skills and experience of the intermediary may be unsuitable.

> *"Some businesses don't want support and we are wrong to presume that everybody wants Government business support."* **– Growth Organisation**
>
> *"It is time out of the business whenever I do these things"* **– Hearing Company**
>
> *"One of the things that I have encountered with small businesses is that they will often not acknowledge that some of their key employees need development."* **– Business Coach**

However, where support was adopted, there needed to be 'buy-in' from owner/managers whose role was to act as project 'champions' to adopt and implement new ideas/solutions to gain the most benefit for their business (Berry 1998) in terms of growth and business development.

Having examined both the positive and negative experiences of co-production in business support, it was clear that the value was generally only added when the relationship was working well. For the purposes of defining the core elements of the Critical Mix in business support, each of the elements, thought to add value, were assigned to twelve main headings identified as contributing to the Critical Mix – see Table 1.

| Core Element | Key Components |
|---|---|
| **Aspirations** | • Owner/manager characteristics<br>• Aims: e.g. Growth / Consolidation / Exit |
| **Business Characteristics** | • Size<br>• Industry type / Sector<br>• Age / Stage of development<br>• Ownership |
| **Trust / Rapport** | • Chemistry<br>• Mutual respect<br>• Strong working relationship |
| **Realistic Goals** | • Achievable plans<br>• Fit with available resources |
| **Planning Horizon** | • Short term – Operational<br>• One year – Operational / Strategic<br>• Three years – Strategic<br>• Five years+ - Vision / Exit |
| **Suitable Funding** | • Sustainable support<br>• Subsidised support<br>• Support programme tailored to budget |
| **Owner/Manager Engagement** | • Commitment<br>• Personal development<br>• Culture of planning (existing / potential) |
| **Networks** | • Connections to intermediary networks<br>• Formal/informal networks of small enterprise<br>• Signposting e.g. brokerage models |
| **Relevant Knowledge** | • Combined technical knowledge<br>• Combined industry knowledge<br>• Combined business knowledge<br>• Additional strategic expertise from intermediary |
| **'Eyes of the Tourist'** | • Outside Perspective<br>• Objective Viewpoint<br>• Considering New Approaches |
| **Appropriate Delivery Mode** | • From Devins and Gold (2000):<br>1. Visionary (2 yrs +)<br>2. Tackling issues of current concern<br>3. Acting as a 'sounding board'<br>• From Rice (2002):<br>1. Continual and Pro-Active<br>2. Reactive and Episodic |

**Table 1 – Proposed Elements/Components of the Critical Mix for Business Support**

## Discussion

Having identified a reliance on ‘soft’ outcomes for measuring the effectiveness of business support (Dewson et al. 2000; Wren and Storey 2002; Bennett and Robson 2004; Ramsden and Bennett 2005), the evidence arising from all of the small enterprises, and from the intermediaries involved in direct support was generally reported as a multitude of ‘soft’ outcomes. There were one or two examples of ‘hard’ measures, but these tended to be for entire programmes, rather than focussing on individual cases. Dewson et al. had suggested that, whilst such soft outcomes could appear insignificant in isolation, when combined as a whole, in terms of achieving outcomes, then significant added-value could be demonstrated. Although there were challenges noted along the way, all of the interviewees presented cases where there had been numerous examples of positive soft outcomes. There was a general perception, from the interviewees, that value was added throughout, and whilst such perceptions could perhaps be considered as subjective and based on factors such as relationship characteristics (Devins and Gold 2000), the evidence from the data was that there were numerous positive views presented throughout which were largely based on valid outcomes and effectively provided a means of triangulation for the full range of outcomes to demonstrate value.

When the small enterprises and intermediaries were asked specifically about aspects where value was thought to be added, the notion of ‘the eyes of the tourist’ came through very strongly. The idea of value being added through viewing both current issues, and strategy formation, from a different perspective was presented in most cases. The knowledge and experience of the intermediary was a further important factor where value was thought to be added through expertise, access to networks, and the ability to shift focus to key matters of importance. Intermediaries were also seen to be inspiring the owner/managers through respect; generating debate; introduction of new ideas; and in moving towards a planning culture. Furthermore, there was a general perception of value being added through co-production itself, where ‘the whole was more than the sum of the parts’

In terms of direct benefits, these appeared to be fairly generic but tended towards successfully dealing with key current issues, strategy formation, and from the personal development of the owner/manager. For the intermediaries, the benefits arising were mainly from personal satisfaction and in building on knowledge and skills. Indeed, the intermediary group raised concerns about the difficulties in gathering accurate ‘hard’ data in terms of measuring the outcomes of programmes.

A variety of approaches to the business support interventions was evident. This generally included support for strategy formation/planning; key strategic factors; and more specialised support. There was no clear single approach identified, but rather a balance of approaches that were dependent on factors including the needs of the small enterprise; policies of the intermediary’s host organisation; the intermediary’s personal preferences/style; relationship factors; and the level of engagement from owner/managers. All of these factors could contribute to the ‘critical mix’ where value is added through co-production (Brudney and England 1983).

With the relationships, themselves, at the core of the co-production process (Adamson 2000), it became clear that rapport, trust and delivery styles were all key factors in the ‘critical mix’. In particular, there were numerous examples of successful outcomes arising from strong perceptions of rapport and trust, although the significance of these perceptions may increase throughout the duration of the business support intervention(s). The data appears to back up suggestions from Devins and Gold (2000) that reports of success in the early stages of interventions were largely subjective and based on perceptions of trust/rapport, rather than on the actual outcomes achieved, that were presented in longer term or completed interventions. This finding also fitted well with the notion of value being added through use (Vargo and Lusch 2004) and highlighted the issue that value can be added both through the perception of owner/managers in the co-production process itself, and through strategies and operation plans being used in practice.

Most of the support, considered in the data analysis, had been offered through funded programmes although there were limited examples of privately paid-for support. There was no evidence of any significant differences between interventions that had been paid for, or not. The only noticeable issue was when availability of funds (either from the intermediary’s host, or the small enterprise) limited the scope of the support – but this did not appear to affect quality of delivery.

Despite numerous descriptions of perceived benefits that linked to added value, there were also challenges experienced by both small enterprises and the intermediaries. With reductions in funding, support was often limited and could sometimes be restricted to certain disciplines. Whilst the Dorset business environment was not thought to be particularly vulnerable (Dorset LEP 2014), there were still challenges, with issues such as employment, skills gaps, low wages and variable broadband coverage. Additionally, small enterprises can be particularly susceptible to external influences, so they needed the agility to be able to adapt to the effects of changes in the business environment (Sparrow 2001).

## Conclusions

Comparing the theory from Dewson et al. (2000) against empirical evidence of a multitude of positive ‘soft’ outcomes, considering these outcomes as a whole, there is a strong case that significant value is, indeed, added through co-production in business support. To maximise this value, then an appropriate ‘critical mix’ (Brudney and England 1983) must be applied to co-production business support interventions.

The following Conceptual Framework (Figure 4), developed throughout this study, applies the notion of the 'critical mix' (Brudney and England 1983) and identifies the key drivers for adding value through co-production in business support. The use of the tornado effect, is a metaphor for the way value is created – having already identified the key components of the Critical Mix (Table 1) we may know what the main 'ingredients' are, but the precise recipe for success may still be difficult to define.

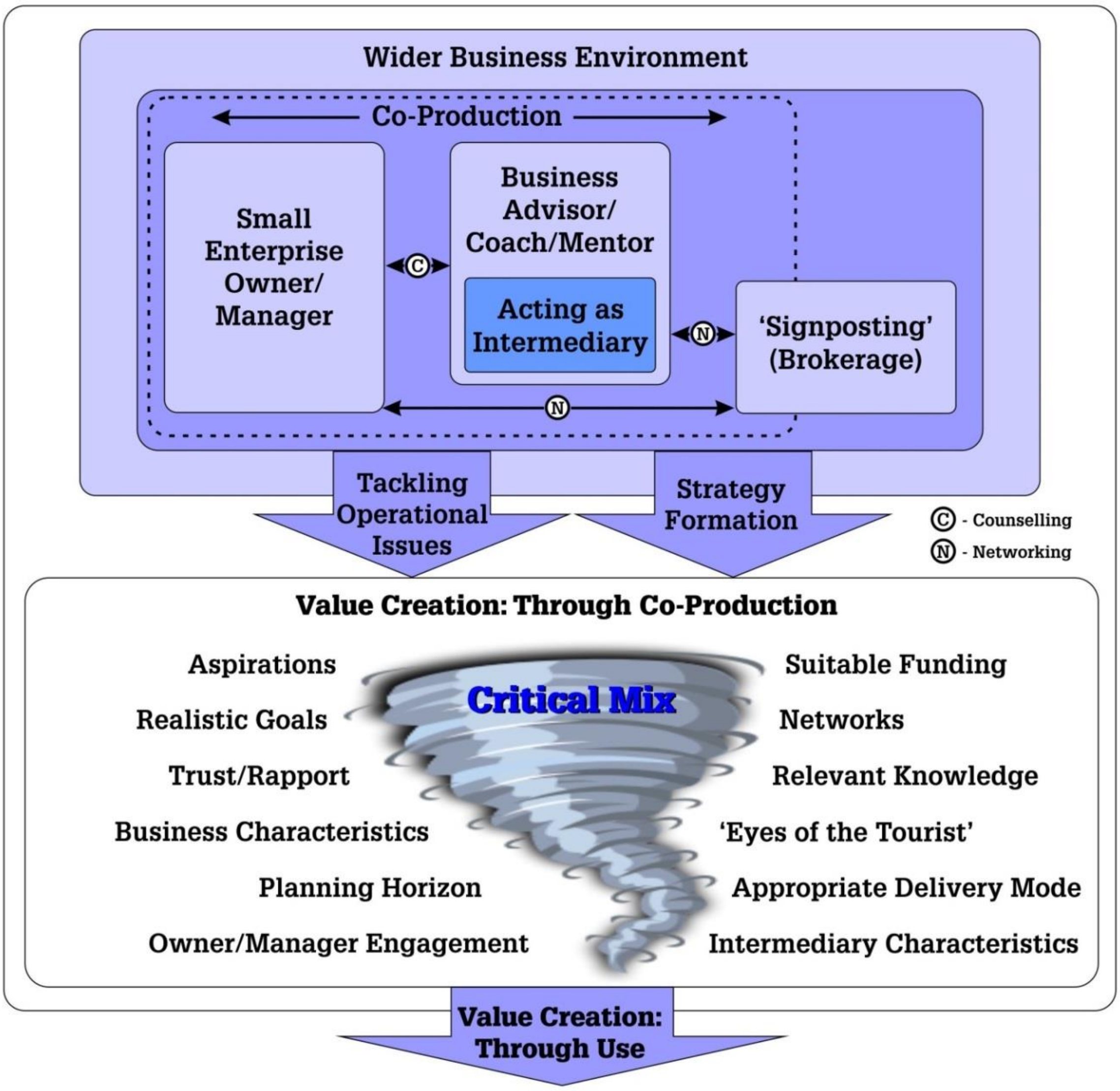


**Figure 5 - Co-Production Framework for Business Support**

Adapted from Rice (2002) / Brudney and England (1983)

This study has made the following key contributions to theory:

1. This study has responded to the call to extend co-production research into other areas outside of public services (Voorberg et al. 2014), and has subsequently linked the themes of business support and strategy formation to co-production and value creation.

2. This study identifies where value is added in co-production business support interventions, through the development of the critical mix.

## Limitations

The time and resources available meant the breadth of the qualitative data collection was limited in the number of small enterprises and intermediaries reached, but these were chosen through 'purposeful sampling' (Patton 2002) to provide rich results. The limitation, in terms of the small enterprises, was addressed through the inclusion of the intermediary group who, between them, had supported hundreds of small enterprises and who were able to draw on experience across numerous interventions.

The study identified that added value was determined through a series of mostly soft and, to a lesser extent, hard outcomes, but this data was almost entirely based on the perceptions of owner/managers and intermediaries. Whilst there have been numerous attempts in the literature to make more use of hard outcomes, no provable causal links between improvements in performance and business support interventions were identified. The study therefore relies heavily on the notion that certain perceived outcomes, which can appear insignificant in isolation, when considered as a set of multiple outcomes, can result in an overall demonstration of added value (Dewson et al. 2000).

## Future Research

- Efforts to measure the value added from business support interventions have been inconsistent, and are often flawed (Chrisman and McCullan 2002). A consistent method for measuring outcomes, across studies, is therefore required.
- Further research could identify how to accurately match the specific requirements of individual small enterprises with elements of the critical mix, to maximise value creation.
- The original co-production work from Parks et al. (1981) could be further developed to take account of value being added through the Critical Mix (Brudney and England 1983).

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