



Comparative Insights into Collaborative and State-Centric Governance: Evaluating Capacity and Legitimacy in Complex Environments

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Abstract. In complex environments, collaborative governance has many advantages on capacity and legitimacy (input and output) in complex scenarios, contrasting with state-centric, top-down, and hierarchical methods. However, collaborative governance has challenges and limitations, including power imbalances, transaction costs, accountability gaps, and coordination failures. Therefore, it is important to note that efficient steering mechanisms are still necessary to ensure the accountability of these collaborative governance arrangements.

Keywords: Capacity; Legitimacy; Collaborative Governance; State-Centric Governance

1 Introduction

The last two decades have seen the rise of “collaborative governance” (Ansell & Gash, 2008). In a collaborative governance paradigm, public authorities involve non-state stakeholders in policymaking and asset management (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 544). Several factors contribute to the apparent decline of state authority. These include expanding disparities in resources or credibility, the breakdown of institutions, and grassroots calls from social groups for stronger governance and policy-making engagement (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009, p. 1). These issues require governments to work with interest groups, private corporations, NGOs, supranational institutions, and other stakeholders to achieve their goals (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009, p. 1). [1] [4]

Collaborative capacity refers to the capacity of individuals, groups, and institutions to address shared issues through knowledge gathering, practical application, and proactive participation (Buuren, 2009, p. 213). Input legitimacy is when people actively influence government decisions through public discourse and voting (Schmidt, 2020). Output legitimacy refers to the phenomenon wherein individuals acknowledge the authority of a governing body due to its efficacy in promoting collective welfare and adherence to societal standards (Schmidt, 2020). Steering involves directing and facilitating governance structures with many players and governing modalities (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009, p. 47). Output legitimacy occurs when people accept a governing body’s authority because it promotes collective welfare and societal standards (Schmidt, 2020).

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Accountability sets the foundation for holding powerful people accountable for their actions and decisions in public governance and management (Aucoin & Heintzman, 2000, p. 45). Public services can be provided hierarchically, although collaboration between public sector agencies and social actors often improves efficiency (Peters et al., 2022). Good governance may prioritize control-oriented or collaborative methods, although both can improve governance (Peters et al., 2022). This essay compares state-centric governance to collaborative governance based on capacity and legitimacy (input and output). [2] [4] [8] [18] [20]

2 Advantages of Collaborative Governance for Enhancing Capacity in Complex Settings

Collaborative governance involves people from different sectors and hierarchies working together to achieve a public goal that cannot be achieved alone (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 2). Capacity-driven governance promotes inclusivity by actively promoting diverse perspectives and concerns, ensuring that individuals are well-informed and empowered to participate in decision-making. In contrast to hierarchical public administration, collaborative governance seeks to be more transparent, inclusive, and flexible while demonstrating less rigid and more dynamic power structures and norms through voluntary and consensual cooperation (Emerson & Gerlak, 2014, p. 770). A governing structure with less paralyzing conflict, deadlock, and more collective action is more capable. Additionally, the state-centric governance paradigm has become less effective in regulating administrative procedures (Erkkilä, 2007, p. 10). [10] [12] [13]

Collaborative governance requires “institutional and procedural structures, leadership, knowledge, and resources” (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 14). The “procedural and institutional arrangements” relate to all the organizational structures and process rules needed to manage recurring contacts throughout time (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 15). According to Huxham and Vangen’s study (cited in Emerson et al., 2012, p. 15), collaborative institutions have lower hierarchy and stability and higher complexity and fluidity than bureaucratic organizations. Leaders must initiate and engage with many stakeholders, resolve issues, and execute outcomes in collaborative governance (Emerson & Gerlak, 2014, p. 771). By strengthening central state institutions and collaborating with diverse social agents, states attempt to improve their governance (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009, p. 2). Regarding leadership, collaborative governance necessitates initiating and engaging with multiple stakeholders, settling conflicts, and implementing outcomes, demanding various leadership responsibilities (Emerson & Gerlak, 2014, p. 771). [4] [10] [12]

Knowledge facilitates collaboration as a shared currency that is both required and generated collectively (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 16). As institutional infrastructures become more complex and interconnected and knowledge becomes more specialized and widespread, collaboration becomes more important (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 544). Convening specialists from various industries to share their resources and perspectives might create “bridging social capital,” which can boost innovation and adaptability (Blanco et al., 2011, p. 302). Rogers and Weber (2010) say integrating and reconciling

data from several databases and protocols improves problem-solving. Additionally, collaborative governance institutions and their partners must be able to acquire resources that existing agencies do not and use them to accomplish government tasks (Rogers & Weber, 2010, p. 548). [1] [6] [12] [19]

3 Advantages of Collaborative Governance for Enhancing Legitimacy in Complex Settings

In conventional state-centric governance, bureaucrats stand for legitimacy regardless of government effectiveness (Lee & Esteve, 2023, p. 1521). Collective governance assumes that involving a wide range of stakeholders in governance processes improves representation and that these stakeholders will advocate for their interests during decision-making discussions (Lee & Esteve, 2023, p. 1521). Unlike state-centric, top-down, and hierarchical methodologies, which may have legitimacy issues due to the exclusion or subjugation of certain actors or interests (Zaharna & Uysal, 2016, p. 114), collaborative governance can strengthen its legitimacy by involving a variety of stakeholders in the decision-making process (input legitimacy) and delivering convincing and equitable results (output legitimacy) (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Diversifying stakeholders has benefits (Bäckstrand, 2006, p. 295). Governments can sometimes gain legitimacy and help implement policies by actively engaging with advocacy groups and local organizations (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009, p. 11). Governments may actively seek information and, especially in problematic decisions, seek political legitimacy by engaging with private firms (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009, p. 11). [3] [4] [11] [17] [21]

Fairness requires that all participants have an equal chance to affect interactive governance processes (Boedeltje & Cornips, 2004, p. 17). When interaction fulfills competence norms, output-oriented legitimacy can be increased (Boedeltje & Cornips, 2004, p. 17). Collaboration is a major subcategory of interactive governance (Kooiman et al., 2008). Since most states can join, the UN's legitimacy comes from its inclusivity (Keohane, 2011, p. 104). Inclusion, representation, and resourcefulness in decision-making require multiple heterogeneous players (Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 706). Additionally, picking non-permanent Security Council members from other members is fair (Keohane, 2011, p. 104). Japan's 1994 response to North Korea sanctions shows the UN Security Council's legitimacy (Hurd, 1999, p. 402). Japan rejected Security Council sanctions on North Korea for its clandestine nuclear development, but Japan followed its ultimate decision notwithstanding its misgivings (Hurd, 1999, p. 402).

If relevant social actors are not actively involved in decision-making procedures, Zürn (2004, p. 286) warns that international institutions may lose their effectiveness. Basic business interests push stakeholders to prioritize output legitimacy, productivity, and competitive advantage (Bernstein, 2011, p. 40). According to the "governance from below" paradigm, more participation from affected groups will improve collective solutions, which implies that deliberative stakeholder consultation will increase output legitimacy (Bäckstrand, 2006, pp. 294-295). [3] [5] [7] [9] [14] [15] [16] [22]

4 Challenges and Limitations of Collaborative Governance in Complex Settings

Collaborative governance is not a cure-all. State-centric, top-down, hierarchical systems can bypass or resolve complex issues, which may include power imbalances, transaction costs, accountability gaps, and coordination difficulties. According to Ansell and Gash (2008, p. 551), more powerful parties may dominate the collaborative governance process if some stakeholders cannot participate equally due to a lack of ability, managerial skills, social status, or financial resources. Two crucial criteria determine input legitimacy: the active involvement and inclusion of numerous stakeholders, guaranteeing legitimacy and efficacy through universal acceptance. However, event coordinators often need help with transaction costs or the difficulty of reaching agreements due to many participants or their differences (Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 706). Klijn and Koppenjan (2015, as cited in Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 707) have noted that collaborative governance models' accountability is difficult. Non-governmental institutions often collaborate with official authorities to generate and implement ideas, making it harder to identify leaders (Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 707). Effective sanctions for largely self-regulatory platforms with nominated personnel representing large interest groups are difficult to determine (Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 707). Collaborative governance frameworks also need a clear narrative that does not require specialized knowledge (Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 707). Bell and Hindmoor (2009, p. 10) also note that state defense, security, and monetary policy policies are still hierarchically established and implemented without external consultation. [1] [4] [9]

5 The Role and Importance of Steering Mechanisms

State-centric, top-down, and hierarchical models have formal governance structures and processes (Zaharna & Uysal, 2016, p. 112). However, collaborative governance requires effective steering systems to ensure responsibility in complex circumstances. Multiple actors collaborate in various degrees of formal interaction to solve shared problems in collaborative governance systems (Cristofoli et al., 2022). Novel governance models may challenge traditional accountability mechanisms due to the difficulties of holding government officials and politicians accountable in the current governance landscape (Erkkilä, 2007, p. 2). Improved accountability does not guarantee better performance, but it is necessary to achieve it (Aucoin & Heintzman, 2000, p. 54). It is crucial to determine who oversees collaborative governance domains and ensures the development and public availability of acceptable financial paperwork (Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 707). Clear and decisive leadership is also needed to ensure accurate record-keeping and communication in collaborative workplaces and accountability forums (Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 707). Effective leaders can also reply to inquiries, properly examine critiques, and actively resolve them in collaborative governance venues (Cristofoli et al., 2022, p. 707). In conclusion, effective collaboration requires better government incentives, organizational decision-making, and individual opinions. [2] [9] [13] [21]

6 Conclusion

This essay argues that collaborative governance systems can better solve capacity and legitimacy issues in complex environments than state-centric, top-down, hierarchical alternatives. The four capacity components, institutional and procedural structures, leadership, knowledge, and resources have been explained. Collaborative governance allows numerous actors to share knowledge, coordinate activities, learn, and pool resources, boosting capacity. Collaborative governance can increase input legitimacy through the active engagement of multiple stakeholders in decision-making. Collaborative governance can also produce persuasive and equitable results, establishing output legitimacy. However, collaborative governance may face power imbalances, transaction costs, accountability gaps, and coordination failures in complex contexts. Thus, collaborative governance requires effective steering systems to maintain responsibility in complex circumstances.

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