

Summary

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Governance Networks in the Public Sector.

A network approach to public problem solving, policy making and service delivery

Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2016

Chapter 1. Introduction

In this chapter, the background to governance networks is explained: trends towards a globalized, network society; the shifting and blurred boundaries between state, market, and civil society; the increasing interdependencies among public and private actors in dealing with wicked problems; and the rise of governance and governance networks alongside traditional public administration and New Public Management. The concept of governance is introduced and discussed, as also the three forms of complexities that characterize governance networks: substantive, strategic, and institutional. Thereafter, the central questions addressed in the book are presented: What is the nature of governance networks in the public sector? What are the implications for problem solving, policymaking, and public service delivery? How can they be studied and managed? Next, the outline of the book is presented.

Part I: Governance networks

Chapter 2. Foundations of governance networks

In this chapter, the theoretical roots of governance network theory are discussed. The chapter distinguishes three traditions in which the network concept plays a prominent role: the policy networks orientation in political science, the inter-organizational theory in organizational science, and the collaborative governance and intergovernmental relationships perspective from public administration. The chapter extensively and systematically discusses the core ideas in each of these traditions and what they have contributed to governance network theory. It also shows that recently there has been more convergence between the different traditions, moving towards a more coherent body of knowledge.

Chapter 3. Substantive complexity in governance networks

In this chapter, the concept of wicked problems is introduced, and concepts are proposed to analyse the substantive complexity of governance networks. The multi-actor setting that characterizes governance networks implies that there is no authoritative, objective definition of problems. Parties have various perceptions or frames of situations and problems. In discourses, actors engage in framing these, thereby generating substantive complexity. As a result and reinforced by societal trends such as individualization, dispersion of knowledge, and the rise of social media, scientific evidence and experts are not automatically authoritative. Evidence-based policies therefore will not easily be realized in governance networks. Complexity is caused not simply by information shortage, but by ambiguity. Searching for information may result in policy advocacy, knowledge conflicts, dialogues of the deaf, and uncertainty. In order to deal with substantive complexity, actors have to find ways to align perceptions, to look for common interests, and to arrive at joint knowledge production.

Chapter 4. Social complexity in governance networks: strategic games

This chapter presents concepts to unravel the complex and erratic nature of interaction processes within governance networks, and the mechanisms that guide these. Interactions in networks take the form of strategic games (rather than being intellectual design processes that evolve according to a set of chronological phases). On the basis of their perceptions and goals, actors develop strategies to influence the process and its outcomes. Since actors anticipate and respond to one another's strategies, specific game types develop, influencing the course and content of games. As a result, games evolve as a series of rounds. In each round, different strategy types and logics dominate. Strategies are deployed in specific arenas: the places where decisions are taken. Since arenas are not accessible to all actors and positions within arenas differ, arenas contribute to the complexity of strategic games and reduce their governability. In order to arrive at joint outcomes, actors have to find a way to collaborate. Because of the collective action nature of interactions in horizontal settings, in which actors are interdependent, collaboration by self-organization (governance) often proves difficult.

Chapter 5. Institutional complexity in governance networks: institutional cohesion and fragmentation

In this chapter, the institutional characteristics of networks and the way they shape and constrain actors' behaviour in games are discussed. Actors are not simply rational beings

following their self-interest, but also rule followers. Three institutional theories and their implications for actor behaviour are discussed: (neo-)economic, sociological, and cognitive institutionalism. Next, the role and characteristics of network patterns, patterns in perceptions, network rules, and trust are discussed. Besides evolving in firmly established networks, strategic games may evolve in weakly institutionalized settings or in settings in which actors from various networks meet, speaking different languages and following different sets of rules. Network rules thus can enhance interaction by reducing interactions costs. Interaction can also be hindered by the content of rules, a lack of rules, or the presence of conflicting rules from various networks.

Part II. Network management

Chapter 6. Governing substantive complexity: furthering cross-frame reflection and negotiated evidence

In this chapter, strategies to manage substantive complexity are discussed. One set of strategies deals with the existence of various frames, ambiguity, and dialogues of the deaf by enhancing substantive variety, cross-frame reflection, and alignment of perceptions in order to overcome dialogues of the deaf and asymmetrical discourses and to arrive at goal intertwinement and win–win solutions. A second set of strategies addresses the question of how experts, knowledge, and scientific evidence can gain authoritativeness in governance networks.

Chapter 7. Governing the game: process management in governance networks

This chapter presents strategies to manage strategic complexity in network processes. The principles for dealing with complexities in strategic games are first discussed, and then three categories of process management are presented; strategies aimed at: connecting and disconnecting actors, arenas, and games; designing processes and agreeing upon process rules; and facilitating interaction processes. Limitations and pitfalls of process management are discussed, as are the skills required of the process manager.

Chapter 8. Governing the network setting: institutional design

This chapter discusses strategies for changing the institutional characteristics of networks. Strategies aimed at influencing institutional rules, patterns of interaction, and patterns in perceptions, and at building trust, are debated. Next, the risks of institutional design are

explored, i.e. the instrumental use of institutional design, the institutionalization of repetitive mistakes, and the destruction of social capital. Finally, the chapter discusses the nature of the institutional design process, depicting the difficulties and limitations of managing the institutional characteristics of governance networks.

Part III. Normative issues in governance networks

Chapter 9. Governance networks and democracy

Within governance networks, processes do not evolve according to the doctrine of the primacy of politics, and, what is more, it can be argued that governance networks are based on alternative sources of democratic legitimacy. In this chapter, it is argued that the primacy of politics is based on a specific interpretation of democracy. Other models and perspectives on democracy exist, implying that democratic legitimacy may have various sources. First, the relationship between networks and traditional, representative democracy is explored more in depth: are they incompatible or complementary? Then, we present various models of democracy in order to identify possible sources of democratic legitimacy in networks. Next, a set of criteria for assessing the democratic legitimacy of governance networks is developed that can be used to assess the democratic nature of governance networks. These criteria can also be used to develop strategies to improve the democratic legitimacy of networks and network processes.

Chapter 10. Governance networks and accountability

In networks, various actors from within and outside government are involved, co-producing policies and services; this makes it hard to answer the question of who is accountable for what and to whom. Accountability problems may relate to the relative closedness of networks towards elected politicians and bureaucratic superiors and towards the outside world: stakeholders, third parties, and the media. They may also relate to the informal and loosely coupled nature of networks, which lack clear accountability mechanisms and standards. Accountability problems may result from the involvement of various actors from different domains and organizations bringing together various forms of horizontal and vertical accountability. Here, it is argued that attempts to establish accountable networks can build on this variety of accountability mechanisms present in networks. However, trying to combine and align existing mechanisms and standards may prove difficult. A first step in this direction may be to make existing accountability mechanisms and standards explicit and subject to

deliberation and negotiation. In addition, joint processes of redesigning accountability mechanisms may be initiated. Finally, examples of ways to enhance horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms in networks are discussed.

Chapter 11. Evaluating governance networks

The variety in perceptions about whether or not governance networks and governance network processes are successful illustrates the difficulties involved in the evaluation of networks and their processes. This raises the question of how we can evaluate the performance and outcomes of governance networks. From a network perspective, rational approaches to evaluation are problematic. This chapter starts with a discussion of the reasons why evaluations are difficult in the first place. Next, it is argued why rational approaches to evaluations are problematic in network settings. Subsequently, alternatives to the classical ways of evaluation from a network perspective are presented, emphasizing the importance of learning about complexities. The chapter then presents three sets of criteria to assess the extent to which learning about, respectively, substantive, strategic, and institutional complexity takes place in networks.

Part IV. Synthesis and reflection

Chapter 12. Analysing governance networks

Knowing the nature of governance networks is crucial not only for understanding why network processes evolve as they do, but also to be able to apply network management. So, analysts and practitioners alike need to be able to analyse and reconstruct networks and their complexities in order to be able to understand their working and to develop strategies and initiate managerial actions. This chapter presents three categories of analytical activities: mapping the actor field involved in a problem situation (actor analysis), analysing the characteristics of the governance network process (process analysis), and analysing the institutional characteristics of the network setting in which the process evolves (network analysis). Within each category, a number of analytical steps are discussed and elaborated, thus providing students and practitioners with analytical tools to understand networks.

Chapter 13. Wrapping things up and looking ahead: towards a New Public Governance

In this chapter, a synthesis of the central ideas put forward in this book is presented. The central arguments and concepts are summarized and combined into an overall theoretical framework. We first summarize the reasoning followed in the first part of the book regarding the types of complexity that characterize governance networks: substantive, strategic, and institutional complexity. This overview reveals the empirical observations and the theoretical and normative assumptions that underlie the governance network approach to dealing with complex policy problems in policymaking and public service delivery. Next, we summarize the network management principles and strategies discussed in Part II of this book.

Thereafter, we wrap up the ideas regarding the question of how to assess governance networks and their processes. Subsequently, we propose five clusters of factors to arrive at explanations for the performance of governance networks. Finally, we present a short reflection on the implications of the predominance of the network-like context of public policymaking and service delivery in the public sector and the extent to which the ideas proposed in this book align with developments towards a New Public Governance as envisioned by various contemporary authors.