Community Engagement and Its Challenges in Complex Governing Networks: Co-Design Challenges and the Incongruency of Governing Networks?

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Abstract

The question of how to govern multiscale problems in today's networked environment is an important topic in public administration and public management. This paper addresses the complexities involved with managing the interaction of actors operating in dynamic networks and various scales of network governance. Specifically, this study examines the role of governance networks and co-design of policy at the local level. Through examination of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and federal waivers associated with the policy to support opportunity youth in local communities across the U.S., this study sheds a better understanding of the role of local public agencies in implementing a federal policy in different networked governance environments.

1. Introduction

Public administrators throughout the world operate in highly differentiated political, social, and economic contexts with dissimilar resources and capacities. With the intensification of globalization in recent decades, economic, social, political, and ideological issues are increasingly transcending national and regional boundaries and circumventing the formal apparatuses of the state. Policy transfers and policy diffusion practices are becoming commonplace not only in the regional alliances or integration organizations but also within the usual international milieu of inter- and intrastate relationships as reflecting the growing pace of interdependence and dynamics of diffusion of the concepts, ideas and empirical experiences worldwide.

In recent decades, an ever-growing number of scholars and practitioners in the fields of public administration, public management, political science and environmental studies have been examining the role of multilevel and multiscale networks, and their interactions, in the public policy process. Traditional and hierarchical public administration/public management paradigms emphasizing the role of formal organizations provide inadequate ways to address global sources of societal problems. Therefore, concepts such as *network governance* are becoming increasingly studied by scholars of public administration and management. Milward and Provan (2006) attribute the rise of societal networks to the hollowing out of the state and the weakening capacity of governmental entities to address complex social, political and economic issues. The concept of the hollow state is a contestable approach for a diverse variety of developed states, including the Scandinavian countries or the countries of continental Europe, who approach reform typically in two ways: through a maintenance approach or a modernization approach. The first maintains the current public management structure but implements small changes for efficiency, while the second allows for more substantive changes to process. However, the arrow of progress and upward development of the 'Anglo-Saxon' or Western English-speaking countries (the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) is closely associated with strategic emphasis on the latter two development trajectories in public management reforms: marketization and minimization. These strategies implement private-sector expectations on the public sector and move more towards maximizing privatization and the use of third-party contracts (Pollitt and G.Bouckaert, 2003). With greater devolution of responsibilities to the states and local governments, we are witnessing the rise of governance paradigms with multilevel and multiscale characteristics.

The study of multiscale networks can be crucial in determining and developing a better understanding of the optimal type of public management approach and related tools. This research, through case study analysis, examines what role complex governance networks have played in addressing issues facing disconnected youth. Specifically, in a multilevel governance network, the study examines the challenges which remain for managers.

2. Conceptual Framework

We have witnessed the evolution of public administration and policy from a classical hierarchical organization to the greater reliance on markets and private sector practices to the fragmented networked governance for the provision of goods and services in the public sector. This shift has occurred in response to new citizen demands and the intensification of globally sourced economic, political and social imperatives. New fiscal constraints placed on local governments, growing demand for integrated services aimed at improving customer service and satisfaction, the increasing role of e-governance as well as the demand for cross-sectoral and cross-governmental collaboration are all compelling factors driving these changes.

Moreover, Rhodes (1997) asserts that the development of governance structures impacts the interaction between state and community actors. Governance over local affairs requires greater engagement of local communities. Devolution and decentralization of federal responsibilities in the last four decades has been an especially important factor in affecting capacity and resources of local governance in the United States. Therefore, local governments

in pursuit of their goals need to rely on the strength and relationships that they have built with network actors, formal and informal. While the state plays an important role in policy formulation and implementation, governing networks plays a pivotal role in innovation when it comes to policy implementation. However, effective form of policy implementation with measurable outcomes requires greater level of collaboration within governance networks.

3. Network Governance & Exchange Mechanism

In the 20th century, scholars of policy and administration emphasized the role of formal hierarchies in the provision of public goods and services. Sharing many of the same principles with the *Fordist* organizational model, the bureaucratic model emphasized efficiency through top-down command-and-control decision-making structures and processes. Under this type of bureaucratic model formal rules and procedures were adopted, outlining the role of government vs. markets. Governments played a pivotal role in shaping the process of production and consumption through spatial interventions and designs.

The financial crisis triggered by the Great Society program along with the oil crisis of 1973 during the Arab Israeli War and the rise of inflation led to greater pressure on governments to move away from taxation and spending. The concept of the "positive state," which among its key attributes include taxation and public spending as the major instruments of regulation, paved the way for the shift towards the managerial (dirigiste) model in some European countries, and since the 1990's onward has yielded ground to the much more diverse leverages of social, economic and administrative actions and activities (Majone, G., 1999). Over the same period, Osborne and Gaebler (1993), while theorizing about the new modes of governance in the U.S. under the generic banner of "reinventing" government stated that no less than 36 "alternatives to standard service delivery" could be found across the U.S. Even the previously conservative stream of thought and the role of government was conceptualized as reshaping traditional division of labor and state/society relations (Eymeri-Douzans, 2011).

Meanwhile, scholars such as James M. Buchanan (Wagner, 2018), theorized the political economy of organizations and decision making. This led to the rise of the belief by some political pundits that reliance on public organizations for the provision of services should be replaced by the markets. This supposition drove New Federalism devolution into political favor, where funds are transferred from the federal government to the localities in the form of block grants, contracts, etc., leading to further fragmentation of delivery of services (Nathan, 2006). The fragmentation has led to the growth of network governance where governments rely on proxies (public-public, public-private, public-nonprofit, and public citizen-group) for the delivery of public goods (Saidel, 2015).

The rise of network governance emerged in response to coordination dilemmas experienced by multi-actor systems aimed at making state, market and societal partnerships more strategic (Considine and Lewis, 2003). Scholars such as Lowndes and Skelcher (1998), assert that network governance regimes aim to foster a culture of trust and cooperation among voluntary players. However, Skelcher (2000), states that the overloaded state of the 1960s/70s, has been replaced by the hollowed-out state of the 1980s/90s and we are encountering the contemporary congested governance networks from this shift.

Forrer et al. (2014) argue that networks can be perceived as organizational alliances which are linked together through addressing common goals and purposes. In this context, approaching the problem from the standpoint of principals embedded into the logical mechanisms that underlie hierarchy, network and the market, the prerequisites that underpin network as a coordination modality ought to include a modicum of "solidarity" that is potentially easier to achieve where objectives are widely shared among all network members, communications are easy and full, and the scale of operations is modest (Pollitt, 2003). This is largely facilitated through the cultivation of long-term relationships (Provan and Milward 2001). Since governance networks and participation within them is voluntary, particularly by non-governmental players, partners bring strategic assets to the table to build trust and reciprocity. Peters (2018) argues that networks provide political, economic and social benefits to the constituents they serve through the adoption of common goals by helping to create economies of scale. Local governments and citizen groups operating at the grass-roots level tend to be most effective because of their immediate proximity to the problems and opportunities within their communities. This claim is consistent with the public choice view that "citizens vote with their feet." Local governments, which are often small in scale and scope, struggle to implement bold agendas in part because they often lack political and economic resources and the capacity to mobilize local stakeholders. In order to take advantage of the benefits offered through network connections, municipal regimes have to fundamentally rethink how they function and operate. Naturally, this is much easier said than done. After all, the decision to work cooperatively within a larger network inevitably involves trade-offs. While participation within a larger network will allow participants to "scale-up" their resources by supporting collective action, individual municipalities may be compelled to place the larger concerns of the network ahead of their immediate needs. Local politicians and agencies may not always find this politically expedient. Indeed, some policymakers have criticized the rise of community governance regimes as being a threat to the democratic process by empowering special interests. Local councils, for example, have raised grave concerns over how community-based organizations have mobilized to curtail the development of new residential units in heavily populated communities plagued by housing shortages.

4. Governance Networks & Public Organizational Scales

The function of applying the concept of scales to public policy was initially introduced through the environmental management science literature (Young 2002; Biermann 2007; Folke et al. 2005, Termeer, et al., 2010, Schultz et al., 2015). Although the idea of scaling initially emerged within environmental studies, when it comes to examining governance networks one can utilize this approach. Scaling involves mapping the spatial, qualitative and analytical dimensions of a given phenomenon to measure its influence on its political, social and economic environment. Thus, the application of scales is becoming an increasingly salient topic in the network governance discourse. In addition, Lebel et al. assert that the way a given problem is scaled (be it at the local, state, national or global level) involves political framing and strategic decision making. Indeed, scaling often reflects the political strategy of actors or agencies seeking to claim credit or avoid blame (Termeer, et al. 2010). This

perspective suggests that actors and agencies frame problems in accordance with the scale where they can exercise the most influence.

This study applies a scaling approach to examine the cross collaboration of multilevel and multi-unit organizations and entities operating within a networked environment to explain challenges that emerge with cross collaboration (Gibson et al 2000, Driessen et al., 2012). Governance networks represent different scales and sizes thus impacting complex interaction among network participants when it comes to collaboration and coordination. The larger the network scale is, it becomes increasingly harder for the participants to coordinate their activities, regardless of if they choose to be collaborative or competitive. This is mainly due to networks not being homogenous or monolithic entities. Complexity is confounded by the fact that each network engenders its own set of scalar politics and internal rationales or mental models (Denzau, Minassians, & Roy, 2016.) Additionally, each network reflects the internal and external political contexts in which they develop and continue to function and operate.

Acute conceptual challenges arise from the fact that each of these governing approaches engender their own discrete set of assumptions related to scale, size and scope of the organizations and the networks that they may be a part. That said, before we can examine co-dependent and co-collaborative networks, we must first address these conceptual issues. We will continue by identifying and unpacking four types of governing systems. These include monocentric, polycentric, multilevel and adaptive governance (Ostrom 2017, Kickert et al. 1997, Folke et al. 2005, Biermann 2007, Termeer et al. 2010). When discussing each of these approaches (or any combination of them), one must analyze their distinct definitions of governance as well as how actors operating at multiple levels in state and society interact within a network.

In a monocentric governance network, the state is the center of power and authority. It is a highly centralized and hierarchical structure where the state mobilizes resources. In monocentric governance the function of political units is based on the constitutional and statutory framework. Within its framework, overlapping jurisdictions can pose capacity problems or create gaps within the network. Large governmental entities possess the resources and capacity to address societal issues but lack the agility to respond quickly and can appear distant and unresponsive to citizens' needs, while smaller governmental units struggle with resources. Although in emergency situations monocentric governance might appear more efficient in terms of quick resource mobilization and operations in addressing and solving a multitude of nascent challenges (if under the declared state of emergency), in daily life settings a monocentric governance network might appear less smart and efficient.

In a polycentric governance structure, multiple jurisdictions with multiple centers are involved as a part of the decision process (Ostrom et al., 1961). In his 2010 article entitled "Polycentric Systems for Coping with Collective Action and Global Environmental Change" Ostrom asserts that "polycentric systems are characterized by multiple governing authorities at differing scales" (p.552). One of the main challenges with polycentric governance structure is lack of clarity and coherence between the functions of various authorities. Additionally,

considering that the public sector is not the main provider of services and heavily relies on proxies, the challenge of coordinating these functions becomes greater. Multiple centers of decision making, each with some degree of autonomy, pose significant challenges (Carlisle and Gruby, 2019). While clarity and coordination can be drawbacks, Charlise and Gruby (2019) argue that polycentric governance systems are more adaptive in mitigating complex environmental issues, thus mitigating institutional failures.

Multilevel governance structure encompasses tri-level policy administration, and can be exemplified through environmental, international and national entities that are engaged in a particular policy regime. According to Horak and Young (2012) there are two dimensions of multilevel governance. The first focuses on the interaction between multilevel governmental and policy regimes, while the second examines the robust engagement of non-state actors. The interactions between public and non-state actors are what shapes policy design and implementation. This dimension focuses on the discrete role that federal, state and local municipal governments play in coordinating and cooperating, if possible, in the implementation and design of policies. Also, the level of discretion that the federal government allows shapes how policies are implemented. One challenge with multilevel governance systems is the fragmentation associated with multilevel players, thus leading to disjointed policies, procedural gaps and in some cases, redundancies (Leuprecht, C., & Lazar, H., 2007). Although proponents of multilevel governance systems argue to allow non-state actors to participate in the policy and implementation space of a particular policy domain, there remains scalar challenges in managing these types of networks. Over participation or under-participation could lead to generating more noise than substantive delivery modalities.

Finally, there is adaptive governance where the focus is on the socio-economic and institutional foundations of multilevel governance. According to Phal-Wostl et al (2007), adaptive management can be defined as learning from the outcomes of past and current strategies in order to take corrective action in real time. Some argue that adaptive governance system allowed the rise of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm where the emphasis is on private sector values and practices such as 'timeliness', 'accountability', 'responsiveness', 'cost-savings' and is focused on customers instead of clients or citizens. Kettl (2000), suggests that there are six core characteristics that appear to be shared in much of the literature on the NPM: productivity, marketization, service-orientation, decentralization, more policy orientation and accountability. However, devolving responsibilities to the localities can be a double-edged sword, where local institutional values, cultures and goals will influence the implementation. Fragmentation under the NPM requires greater level of coordination by local governance networks. Also, not all governance networks mirror each other thus overlaying the policy for the implementation will yield differing results. Considering that the case study presented in this research deals with social services, it is unclear whether this adaptive strategy yields the same results.

The size of governance networks can scale up provision of public goods and services, while simultaneously can pose challenges in the governance of scalar politics, with a greater level of participants making collective action harder. Paasi (2004) asserts that there needs to be better spatial integration considering that all players with a network do not bring equal power

and influence. Therefore, specific institutionalized practices are differently scaled. Swyngedouw (1997), argues that scalar politics are produced through contestation, conflict and coordination between players. Scales remain fluid and scalar politics shift between players and level of participation. Scales tend to vary from one region to the next and are prone to change as the participants change. Consequently, politics, which is a state of perpetual flux, dictates the scalar relations between actors within the network. In fact, Allen and Cochrane (2007) argue the intertwined nature of networks is critical to the creation of political economies of scale.

The models and approaches described above can vary in their degree of applicability to real-world practices and the changing preferences on the ground over prolonged periods. Moreover, the potential range of governance models and implementation modalities can be combined into a "hybrid" format comprising the elements of different approaches while reflecting the complexity, scale and scope of the governance functions and roles. Depending on the regional/international setting as a key impact factor and variable on the one hand, while replicating the current stage of development and strategic perspective goals on the other, the governance modes and managerial modalities, particularly in the case of developing countries or states in transition, are balancing acts that are fostered by value-driven and technocratic considerations simultaneously.

5. The Governance Networks and Co-Design of Policy

The idea of co-design is not new in the field of public administration. Co-design is utilized as a new or different way to address longstanding social challenges that public sector organizations encounter. The idea of co-design is to allow non-state and community-based organizations to participate or voice their concerns and possibly actively participate in design to provide innovation. According to Blomkamp (2018), co-design can be defined as a set of distinct practices for understanding issues and identifying solutions. It signifies where multi-policy domain participants can identify, develop and test various shared challenges. This is particularly relevant for the case to be analyzed for this research. If co-design is loosely defined, then any activity might be considered co-design. Much like concepts such as coordination and coproduction that come from the private sector, the idea of co-design emerged from innovation literature (Farr 2013). Blomkamp (2018) argues that co-design for policy has three components: process, principles and practical tools.

Co-design remains unclear when it comes to processes in various policy domains. In the private sector, co-design could mean design-led processes. According to Evans and Terrey (2016), co-design means discovery leading to design. As with policy cycle, in practice the process is not linear considering that governance networks are highly complex with various scales and capability of the players. Also, co-design could follow the principles of participatory design (Bevir, 2009). In participatory co-design, people affected by the design decisions should be involved. However, the challenge is whether one talks about expert participation or affected stakeholders. Co-design within governance networks means a greater level of community and stakeholder participation. Although some obvious concerns may arise about the "level of expertise" of the engaged community and main

actors/stakeholders-in-process, yet the major rationale of a wider community participation in policy design is based on the democratic concept (Blomkamp, 2018). This suggests that policy stakeholders aim at creating a vehicle for innovative participation in policy-making process to prove the sustainability of co-design modes.

Finally, some argue that co-design can use practical tools in the form of mapping: journey mapping or strategy maps. Co-design of policy utilizing this tool requires a greater level of community engagement within governance networks. Two main challenges in co-design of policy is the complexity of governance networks and, within a particular governance network, the challenge of how create needed congruency for the outcomes. Blomkamp (2018) suggests that although there are challenges in scaling up policy co-design within the public sector, there remains promise.

6. Methods: Case Analysis

This study utilizes case study analysis by relying on multiple cases allowing the research to describe examples and settings where the problem and phenomenon is examined. Utilizing explanatory form, the purpose of this study is to explain how or why some locations utilize different approaches and strategies for addressing the needs of Opportunity Youth. Case study analysis utilized in this study will provide a better understanding in the choice of agencies across different regions implementing WIOA waivers. There are limitations to a single case study, including the inability to generalize. Given limitations of a single case study, the desire for depth and a pluralist perspective and tracking the cases over time implies that the number of cases must be few (Meyer, 2001). This study identified a few key observations such as what states relied on human service agencies while others utilized workforce and economic development departments. Are the organizations applying for the WIOA waiver the right machinery to implement these policies. Also, comparing case analysis among different localities reflects type of funding utilized. Finally, closer examination of Los Angeles, as a case, reflects complexity of policy implementation within a large public network.

7. Case Study

In Fall 2015, the White House announced that nine communities in the U.S. had been selected in the first round of the Interagency Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth Initiative (P3). The following sites received P3 designation: Baton Rouge, LA; Broward County, FL; Chicago, IL; Eastern Kentucky; Indianapolis, IN; Los Angeles, CA; Oklahoma; Seattle, WA; and Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, TX. These pilots give state, local and tribal governments an opportunity to test innovative strategies by offering them flexibility in the application of federal rules and the use federal funding streams to improve outcomes for low-income, disconnected youth, ages 14 to 24, including youth who are or have been in foster care, housing insecure, justice-involved, unemployed, have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school, or a combination of any listed above. Pilot locations also utilized braided or blended forms of funding. Braided funding is the use of funds from the Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Education and Corporation for National and Community Service. Blended funding programs utilized DOL discretionary programs and mixed it with CNCS.
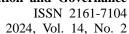
Los Angeles is set to implement one of the most ambitious, comprehensive and far-reaching models in the country. The P3 is an unprecedented effort in Los Angeles to coordinate and integrate the delivery of education, workforce and social services to disconnected youth ages 16 to 24. The Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) strategic plan mapped out ways to bolster collaboration between the City of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Los Angeles Community College District, Los Angeles County, and host of private and community partners. The Los Angeles P3 is a leading effort of the City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles Community College District, local Cal State Universities (CSU5), Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Los Angeles Housing Service Agency, and over 50 public, philanthropic and community-based organizations to improve the service delivery system for the disconnected young adult population and improve their educational, workforce, housing and social well-being outcomes.

Two of the nine pilots solely focused on a specific subpopulation of disconnected youth. One pilot was designed specifically for young parents of children younger than age 5 in Head Start or Early Head Start programs. These youth could be in or out of school. In the second focused pilot, they selected in-school foster youth ages 14 to 17 who would be transitioning to independent living as the target population. The pilot identified this group as most in need of coordinated employment and education services. The pilots also planned to serve different numbers of youth with their approved discretionary program funding that was procured outside of the P3 authority. Based on their use of discretionary program funds and interpretation of the notice inviting applications, pilots intended to serve from 80 to 7,475 youth over the course of the pilot.

The primary area of interest, regardless of the scope and size, was utilizing the waivers for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Congress passed the Act with a wide bipartisan majority. It is the first legislative reform of the public workforce system since 1998.

However, not all locations and localities utilized the same strategies. Some pilots focused on workforce agencies as the lead pilot agency and the grantee, while in other cases local government entities served as the grantee and lead pilot agency. In one pilot, a human services agency capitalized on its existing relationships and experience with a similar initiative to bring service providers together. For example, two pilots had staff turnover due to lack of understanding of the P3 pilot process and the goals that they were aiming to achieve. In the case of Los Angeles, for example, the lead partner agency brought 40 partners to use the P3 authority to evaluate the system of providers serving disconnected youth. One challenging point remains who is the lead agency. In the case of Los Angeles, the City Workforce and Economic Development applied for the P3 designation with the promise that Los Angeles County will cooperate with the City agency. Even though they have maintained a working group, the larger players within the County of Los Angeles and their collaboration

at times remain challenging.

The challenge of coordinating and designing collaboration across the network of public, private and non-profit remains elusive where you have authority and jurisdictional problems. Considering that the City of Los Angeles and specifically the City Workforce and Economic Development Department and the County Workforce Development Department were the main applicants for the P3 designation and funding, it does not mean that other agencies are not actively involved, such as probation, mental health, social services, courts, foster care system, etc., as much larger and complex public systems. The classical challenge, in practice and not just commitment, is how to scale-up services across all of these agencies to address the needs of disconnected youth while serving a much larger constituency in the County. Los Angeles County has 75 school districts and considering that LAUSD is the second largest school district in the U.S., it is an enormous challenge to build a cooperative and collaborative system across other school districts where youth attend. Also, each public agency relies on contractors and proxies for the delivery of services across the region, where not all contractors and youth centers working with them are aware of each other.

Many pilots encountered challenges in fully realizing the flexibilities of the application of federal rules offered by the P3 designation, including (1) lack of understanding and unclear guidance offered around the flexibility, (2) state- and local-level reluctance to recognize or support the federally granted flexibilities, and (3) the value of implementing the flexibilities given the small numbers of youth that some of the pilots served. In the case of Eastern Kentucky, due to existing contracts that the local WIOA administrative agency had with its youth programs providers, those funds could not be blended.

8. Case Study Analysis

The case study of P3 represented in this study reflects challenges that many public agencies and localities encounter based on the governance of small or large networks when it requires collaboration and commitment from all players. In the case of Los Angeles, the lead agency, LA City Workforce and Economic Development, has 168 employees and 49 volunteer board members with heavy reliance on the procurement of youth services through youth centers. It therefore does not have the capacity and past experience in strong cross-collaboration with large County agencies where mental health, probation and the foster care system is run by a completely different entity.

Multiple lessons learned from the nine sites of P3 across the country reflect the fact that the scale of network, scalar politics of the networks and convergence policy could not be congruent where collaboration depends on the agreement of other systems and active participation. Second, considering that the County and City workforce departments rely on sub-contractors for the provision of educational services along with social service recommendation, evaluation of what has occurred is a daunting task. There are no adequate data or data systems and at times data collecting requires duplication of data across multiple platforms making the job of sub-contractors challenging. Utilization of data is elusive where the data points and indicators along with the methodology differ across public agencies. The greater reliance on "NPM" practices and further hollowing out of state suggests greater

fragmentation with the governance networks. Also, the type of network as indicated in this study dictates the abilities of various public agencies and their role in allocation of resources. This study further suggests that there has been no emulation across all nine sites or policy harmonization. Rather this study shows that in the case of P3 there has been a greater level of elite network across public systems.

9. Conclusion

This study has examined the role of multilevel and multiscale actors in governance networks following the movement from traditional governing structures to a hollowed-out state. Specifically, this study utilized conceptual frameworks from network governance, scales of networks, and scalar politics within the networks to highlight the complex relationships among stakeholders in the public and private systems. By examining the P3 case study, the study highlights the disconnect between the large number of stakeholders and the lack of information sharing caused by the minimization of public agency control and decentralization of resources different networked governance environments.

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